
The future of electronic entertainment issue#142
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EDGE®
PLAYSTATION2 I XBOX I PC I GBA
Ico 2
Big, ugly, beautiful:
Sony rebuilds the
platform game
Previewed: GTA: San And
Ghost Recon 2, Killzone,
Ratchet & Clank 3, Snow
Reviewed: Fable, Evil Geni
OutRun 2, Star Wars Battle
Phantom Brave, Rocky Le
Plus: SNK Battle Coliseum
and the best of JAMMA 2
the future of videogame c





The phone call came in. We'd been awaiting it for what seemed like years and weren't sure when it would finally arrive, but here it was: did we want to run a story on *Ico 2*? Yes, *another* sequel. Except this wasn't 'another sequel', not only because *Ico 2* is merely a working title (it may be called *Wanda And Colossus*, it may not), but because it's not another game about escaping from a castle while protecting a waif-like girl from the macabre attentions of ethereal spirits. It's not like *Mario*-in-3D-again-but-with-a-water-cannon-this-time-around. That, it seems, would be too easy. Instead, we are faced with something genuinely new. So of course we wanted to run a story on *Ico 2*. How could we not? You can read it beginning on page 52. We think you'll be as intrigued by the premise as we are.

When we weren't attempting to get our heads around the prospect of clambering over giant stone monsters looking for weak points into which we might plunge deadly swords, we were in London for Game Stars Live, GDCE, ECTS and EGF (see p6), drinking with bedroom-coders-made-good Introversion (p60), pondering the future of game control (p76), exploring the staggeringly innovative world of *Second Life* (p68), remembering the days when *Wipeout* seemed like a special kind of future (p114), smiling at the prospect of a new wave of arcade-bred shooters from Japan (p10), finishing *Fable* three times in the process of finally reviewing it (p94), and doing a lot of reading (p86).

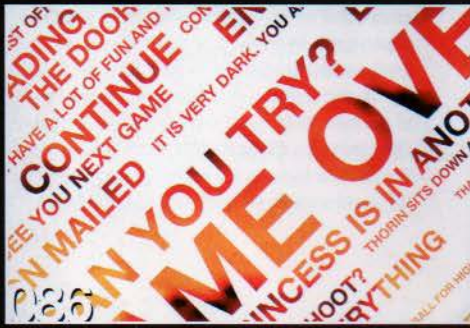
On top of that, we've also been thinking about a sequel of our own, which you'll see next month in the form of a few changes to the magazine. But that's another month away. For the time being, enjoy what's here and now. People tell us we sometimes don't do enough of that.



Features











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The Future Network plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FNET).

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www.thefuturenetwork.plc.uk





Bath London **Milan** New York **Paris** San Francisco





ABC 27,464
January-June 2004
(Audit Bureau of Circulation)

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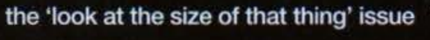
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directory/november

the 'look at the size of that thing' issue





















Regulars

Prescreen

Testscreen

Production of **Edge**
Hardware: Power Macintosh G3, G4, G5
Software: QuarkXPress, Adobe Photoshop, Macromedia FreeHand and Microsoft Office **Typography:** (Adobe®) Helvetica UltraLight, Thin, Light, Roman, **Medium, Bold**

Printed in the UK by Southernprint, Poole, Dorset

Future Games: the first choice for gamers
Edge is brought to you by Future Publishing Ltd, the makers of PC Gamer, GamesMaster, PlayStation2 Official Magazine-UK, PlayStation World, NGC, PSM2

"I have not finished with Jason. Let us continue the game another day."

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge

UK game events mark silly season

After five game shows in five days, we delve behind the acronyms and conspiracy theories of what in less fractious times was known as London Games Week





For an industry characterised by products featuring brutal hand-to-hand combat, fiendish time management and a certain degree of hyperbole, the farce of simultaneous game shows in west and east London proved an apt metaphor. Held from September 1–3, the European Computer Trade Show (ECTS) remained in its traditional Earl's Court home. An hour away, over in the brash glass-and-steel of Docklands' ExCeL centre, stalked the challenger, the European Games Network (EGN). Both trade-only events, the confusion was compounded by further fragmentation. Held concurrently at Earl's Court over the same period was the Game Developers Conference Europe (GDCE); matched day for day by the upstart European Developers' Forum (EDF), held at ExCeL. The joker in the mix was the ITV-branded Game Stars Live, a five-day public event co-sponsored by Kiss FM and The Sun, where for £12 (£10 in advance) punters could queue to play the likes of *Halo 2*, *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory* and, if they were over 18, *Playboy: The Mansion*.

In this convoluted context – where some industry types were happier to ignore the whole messy affair and stay at home – it seemed churlish to try to define the winners and losers in the hope that next year would bring sense (and conciliation) to the warring parties. But, of course, it didn't take long for the rival camps to measure up their own successes.

"While we were always confident EGN would be the show the industry needs and wants, it's good to see the industry and press confirming there simply is no contest between EGN and any other trade event," boasted **Roger Bennett**, director general of the Entertainment And Leisure Software Publishers Association (ELSPA), owner of the EGN event which is managed by London EventCo, the in-house organising arm of ExCeL. London EventCo owns the consumer Game Stars Live event as well as EDF, which is also part owned by TIGA, the trade body for the UK's independent developers. (Are you keeping up?)

"As I said beforehand, running two trade shows didn't do anyone any favours. But everyone expected we would roll over and die. And we didn't. We'll still be around in 2005," countered **Andy Lane**, event director at CMP, owner of ECTS as well as the US-held Game Developers Conference and UK-held GDCE shows.

Which is exactly the sort of behaviour that got the industry into this position in the first place. So, without the intervention of cooler heads, it seems likely that 2005 will again see two rival trade shows, the only improvement being they won't take place at the same time. To that end, ELSPA has



Game Stars, as a consumer event, needed much more rigorous security than the industry is used to at closed trade shows



There was no denying that the approach to ExCeL felt a little more glamorous than the back alleys of Earls Court. Visitors also seemed impressed with the magic driverless Docklands Light Railway

"Running two trade shows didn't do anyone any favours. Everyone expected we would roll over and die. And we didn't. We'll be around in 2005"





Though attendance was down year on year, GDCE still managed to attract the likes of Peter Molyneux. Meanwhile EDF's first outing was respectable, featuring Rebellion's Jason Kingsley (above) on a panel discussing 'empowering creativity'







My success is bigger than your failure



And so to the scores on the doors. During the five days of Game Stars Live (the first day of which was only open to EGN pass holders), overall attendance was 51,400, with Saturday's 17,000+ being the largest single-day total. The trade-only three days of EGN saw a total of 3,700 attendees, of which 1,400 were invited industry figures, 1,500 paying delegates and 800 press.

The three-day European Developers Forum played host to 260 delegates, including speakers. Across town, ECTS was less busy, but not as empty as might have been predicted.

As we went to press, ECTS hadn't released its attendee figures, although GDCE was graced by 581 delegates, including 122 speakers. Of course, a reasonable fraction of attendees for the trade and developers shows would have been counted multiple times. We, for example, managed to end up with five different passes for four shows.













For Game Stars' pricey entrance fee, visitors got the opportunity to play (clockwise from top left) *Halo 2*, *Prince Of Persia 2*, *Project: Snowblind*, *The Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap*, *Brothers in Arms*, *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent*, *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes*, *Forza Motorsport* and *Pro Evolution Soccer 4*

been quick to announce its 2005 dates, with EGN and EDF on from Wednesday August 31 to Friday September 2. Once again, Game Stars Live will run concurrently with them as well as over the following weekend. As for CMP's event, Lane says nothing is set in stone, whether that be the name of the show, when it is or even where it's held. Lane, Bennett and TIGA CEO **Fred Hasson** will be meeting in future, however, to see if any accommodation can be thrashed out. Considering the limited audience for developer shows, it's hoped that GDCE and EDF, at least, can be combined in some way – the provisos of name, location and timing not withstanding.

"This year proved to be highly political. People's egos got in the way and we got caught in the crossfire," confessed Hasson concerning TIGA's eventual backing for the EDF. Up until May, it had been happy with GDCE. "My prime objective is to ensure that only one conference takes place."

But for the bigger issue of the trade shows, putting the genie back into the bottle could be a tall order, for underneath the seeming pettiness of the disagreement, some point to a significant issue: money.

Like many hit-driven industries, it's possible to make (or lose) a lot of money organising conferences. The fixed costs of venue hire and marketing are huge, but when you're charging hundreds of pounds per ticket for thousands of industry delegates or even tens of pounds to tens of thousands of punters, let alone the hundreds of thousands charged to companies for booths, the profits at a well-attended show can quickly mount up. For example, the US equivalent of ELPSA, the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) runs the hugely successful E3 trade show, which in 2004 boasted attendance figures of 65,000, with over 400 companies showing their wares. On a smaller scale but nevertheless also measuring its profits in multiple millions is the CMP-owned Game Developers Conference, attended annually by around 10,000 developers.

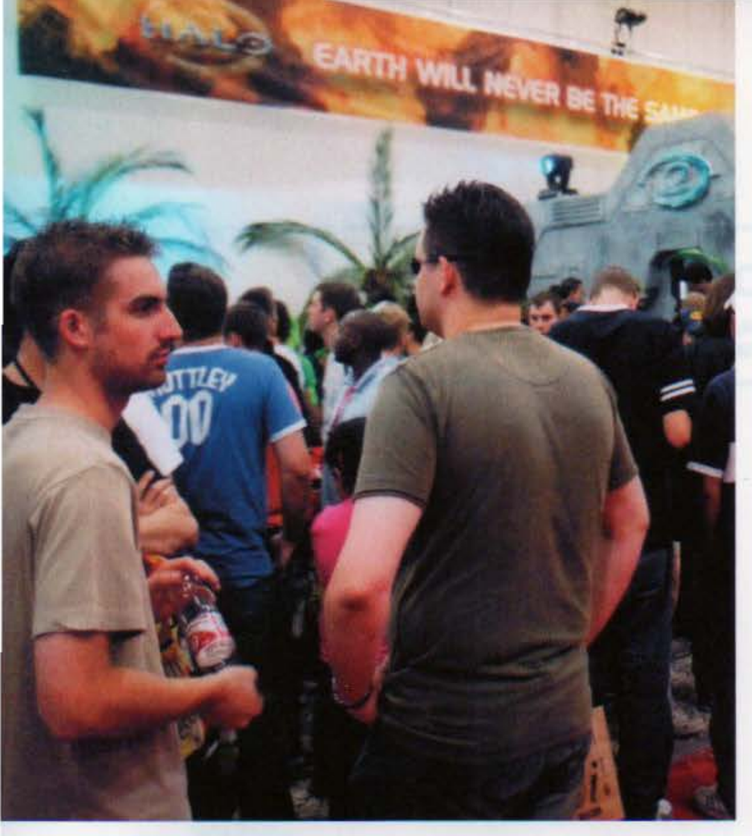
To some extent, the issue of who







In among all the novelties and blaring corporate sound systems, the Joystick Junkies booth was consistently packed. *Galaga*, it seems, can still hold its own against the temptations of *Halo 2*



e focal point of Game Stars wasn't so much the impressive *Halo 2* landing pod, but the vast *lo* queue. The time visitors got with the game felt like seconds, the hours waiting more like days



The Master Chiefs were stationed directly opposite the Storm Troopers, but no fights broke out. The Troopers were on the side of good, collecting charity money for every photo taken with them

;ome think conference organisation isn't an ppropriate role for trade bodies which were set p to support the interests of their members

nefits from successful trade shows is an portant issue. As supporters of trade ganisations argue, it makes sense for any rplus – ELPSA is a non-profit organisation o be put back into the industry rather an accruing to a commercial organisation nich may or may not invest in the future. ertainly, one long-running criticism of CTS was that, as a commercial event, orspace was too expensive. The result as that big publishers pulled out, preferring stead to organise their own events.

And it was this situation which provided e opportunity for ELSPA and London entCo to launch their rival shows. As we ve learned, the initial proposition came om London EventCo which, having ensed the Game Stars Live brand from anada, approached ELSPA with the date the last week of the school holidays. scussions were then held with CMP ncerning ECTS, but no agreement could reached – one key sticking point believed be the show's location at ExCeL.

Yet there are some who think nference organisation isn't an appropriate le for trade bodies, such as ELSPA and GA, which were set up to support the erests of their members. "It seems to me at the game industry trade associations ve lost sight of their reason for existing," ys **Martine Parry**, CEO of consultancy Kezos, which organised GDCE and which in the past has also worked for TIGA. "Trade associations have an obligation to remain focused on the primary purpose for their existence and should not get involved in the core business of the industry that they purportedly represent."

There's also the issue of what happens if shows aren't profitable. Although both Game Stars Live and EGN are financially backed by London EventCo, they are quite different shows in terms of audience and scope. And while there are good reasons to run the two simultaneously, this could easily change if, for example, one is profitable and the other loss-making. (It's not believed either made a profit this year, although this isn't unusual for inaugural events.) Equally, if Game Stars Live fails – and there remains the stalking horse of Sony's PlayStation Experience to take into account – it's hard to see a compelling reason for London EventCo to stick with EGN. And so the industry is left with a worst-case scenario. The next few months will be crucial in ensuring September 2005 doesn't end up as a rerun of 2004's mess.







The Nintendo funfair had a rocky start, as technical problems shorted out its entire electrical supply. The promise of *Donkey Konga* and some excellent freebies brought people flocking back

JAMMA 2004 offers rays of hope

Japan's arcade showcase still lacks the clout of past highlights, but new, cheap and cheerful hardware could bring old blood back to the ailing market

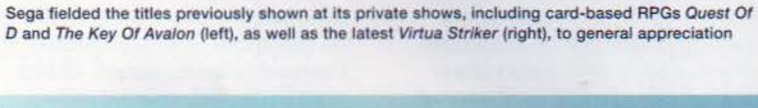
Once the yearly highlight of the Japanese arcade scene, the JAMMA show, like its industry, has seen better days. Those hoping the 2004 event might herald a reversal of the arcade market's decline would have had those hopes shaken by the smallest turnout to date, with neither Konami nor Tecmo in attendance and a subdued Sega sharing space with Sammy.

Even so, there were strong titles keeping their heads above the watered-down selection of pachislot gambling machines, UFO catchers and card games. *Tekken 5* made a promising showing, boasting improved visuals over previous footage and tangibly making good on promises to return the series to its roots, with play proceeding in the spirit of *Tekken 3*. Namco also continued its rehabilitation of the Druaga brand (following Arika/Chunsoft's recent PS2 title *The Nightmare Of Druaga*), debuting an alpha version of *The Battle Of Druaga*. A four-cabinet linked system using touch-panel operation, the game appears much like an arcade-paced version of *Diablo*. Too early in development to judge, the units were also cursed, perhaps in aptly masochistic Druaga style, with a low-quality screen that proved an eyesore after only a few minutes of play. In the independent corner, Cave's latest vertical shooter *Mushihimesama* (previewed on p48) attracted a sizeable and enthusiastic crowd.

But the show's most promising development was the suggestion of a shift from the industry's current obsession with exorbitant, self-defeatingly expensive bespoke hardware to low-cost platforms favouring software. Joining Sammy's







Sega fielded the titles previously shown at its private shows, including card-based RPGs *Quest Of D* and *The Key Of Avalon* (left), as well as the latest *Virtua Striker* (right), to general appreciation





omiswave is Taito's new Type X. Just as e Atomiswave is essentially a ROM board-ised Dreamcast, the Type X is a 2.5GHz eleron PC with games embedded on a andard hard drive. And in a similar fashion Sammy's relationship with its platform, ito will be handling publishing duties for pe X titles, making it an attractively priced ospect for independent developers.

In fact, it's proven enough of a draw to ing a stellar line-up of the Japanese cade old guard under Taito's banner, iggesting the machine has a bright future as a shooter superpower. New instalments of Takumi's *GigaWing*, Alfa System's *Shikigami No Shiro*, and a long-overdue return of Seibu Kaihatsu's *Raiden* have been announced, with support also pledged by the likes of Cave, Treasure, Psikyo, Success and Skonec (the South Korean creator of *Psyvariar*). Also contributing are 2D fighter developer Eolith (its medieval fantasy brawler *Chaos Breaker* is due for December) and Arc System Works, of *Guilty Gear* renown. Encouragingly, the proprietary Type X middleware is intended to allow easy conversion of games to home consoles, suggesting Taito intends to follow each title's arcade run with a home reprise.

Type X is intended to allow easy conversion of games to consoles, suggesting Taito intends to follow each title's arcade run with a home reprise

Atomiswave, meanwhile, was host to two new beat 'em ups at the show. After a disappointing run of console brawlers, Dream Factory has turned its attention to the arcades with *Kenju*, a stylised fighter









Tekken 5

Namco assures us *Tekken 5*'s JAMMA version was not fully tuned: characters could be launched into the air and juggled to within an inch of their life far too easily. Grabs and throws were also overpowered, but the final months of development will likely focus on balance. The Sega crowd will note that *Tekken 5*'s online services (as mentioned in **E**139) are not only inspired by *VF4*, but will be licensing Sega's network technology for it.



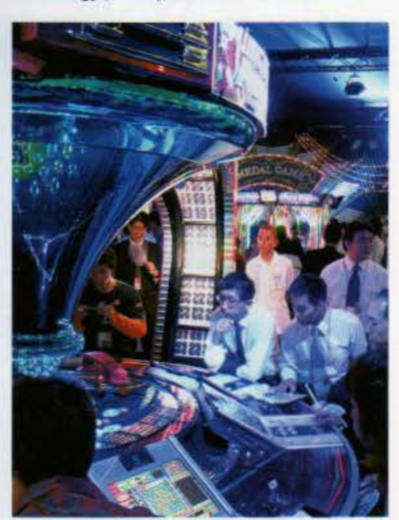








In the absence of the likes of Konami, smaller players such as Aruze, with its touch-screen technology (far left), attracted more interest



that, despite being in full 3D, retains a 2D, single-path fighting mechanic. Characters seem to use the same slick cel-shading technique from the developer's recent PS2 effort *Crimson Tears*, but the overall visuals currently lack the refinement and charisma of its arcade competitors. Still to be fully optimised, and with the last few members of its 14-strong cast yet to be implemented, there's time for *Kenju* to improve, but it seems unlikely that the developer will rediscover its *Tobal*-era form with the title.

In contrast, SNK Playmore's contribution to the show – though shown in video form only and still in the early stages of development – snatched many 'game of the show' nods. *Neo-Geo Battle Coliseum*, practically a counterpunch to Capcom's aborted *All Stars* and current *Fighting Jam*, gathers celebrities from all the Neo-Geo's iconic series for a two-on-two tag battle. As well as drawing on history, backgrounds are sentimental winks to titles from *Top Hunter* to *Cool Cool Toon*. If the gameplay measures up, it could go a long way toward seeing SNK Playmore absolved for dragging its feet on SNK's properties in the past.

The 2004 show proved more hopeful than the dwindling attendance might have suggested. Arcades are about to face a new wave of threats in the form of the next-generation handhelds (and soon, consoles), but a constant stream of new titles to fill the vacuum between big names could bring more life back to the culture than all the novelty machines on display.

Neo-Geo Battle Coliseum

One of *NGBC*'s few disappointments, other than its non-playable state, was that its original characters Ai and Yuri sorely lacked charisma in comparison to their elders and betters. The fighting system appears straightforward but, as much of the actual character interaction is unfinished – the showing being more a statement of intent than a demonstration of gameplay – it's an observation that could be proved untrue when a playable version appears at the Tokyo Game Show. The game is also set to use Atomiswave's online functionality, but details of this aspect were again politely deferred until later.











Yokushin GigaWing Generations

With Takumi's previous shooter partner Capcom all but withdrawn from traditional arcade production, the latest *GigaWing* will be the premiere Type X title, due for an October launch in Japanese arcades. Compared to its predecessors, *Generations* has a surprisingly low-key graphical style, although it retains the series' hallmark Reflection Force feature (an energy shield that, true to its name, turns incoming fire back on your attackers). Four models of fighter feature, each with a signature attack pattern, and these can be upgraded during play. Bombs are more powerful than in previous titles and are now guaranteed screen-clearers.





The current mainstays of the arcade, gambling machines (top) and toy dispensers (below, with some familiar faces) show no sign of bowing out









Taito Type X: the specs

- CPU: Celeron 2.5GHz FSB400, Intel 856G chipset
- RAM: 256MB (DDR266 DIMM), second slot available for RAM expansion
- Graphics: Radeon 9200SE 128MB (AGP 8x) as standard (can be upgraded to Radeon 9600SE or 9600XT according to individual software requirements)
- Security: USB dongle (copy protection security), protected BIOS, original format for games' data on hard drive
- Display: 31KHz VGA and 15KHz interlaced; up to 1,600x1,200 resolution
- JVS interface compatible with Sega's Naomi 2 JVS connector
- Audio: AC-97, line output with 2.1 to 5.1 channel sound support, microphone input plug
- LAN: 100BASE-XT with TCP/IP, TCP/IPver6 support
- 4 USB 2.0 connectors (one in use for dongle)
- Serial port RS232
- Parallel port
- 2 PCI slots for future expansion
- Keyboard and mouse connectors



ega's shooter *Ghost Squad* proved one of the its of the show. This was down to the game and othing to do with its promotional staff (below)







Dare prepares to go global

Another successful year for Scotland's student game competition opens up new opportunities

In its fifth year, the University of Abertay Dundee's Dare To Be Digital student game creation competition continues to get bigger and better. Open to Scottish students, 2004 saw the addition of an Irish team for the first time, while support from the Scottish Executive will see 2005's competition going global. Eight scholarship places for students from Hong Kong, China, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand will be funded as part of the Fresh Talent initiative, which is designed to encourage creatives to set up companies in Scotland.

Andy Kerr, Scotland's finance minister, said: "Fresh Talent is all about identifying new ways to attract more people to come to work in Scotland to complement our home-grown talent. Dare To Be Digital fits perfectly." There are also plans to extend the competition to English universities.

As for the 2004 competition, 27 teams submitted original game concepts, of which six were accepted into the ten-week prototyping period at the university's computer labs. Mentoring was provided by local experts, as well as by the occasional visit from sponsoring companies such as Electronic Arts and Rare.

Working together

Cooperation seemed to be the main theme of this year's competition, with many of the games invoking multiplayer game mechanics. These ranged from the neat splitscreen twoplayer puzzle gameplay of technical excellence winner *Just Add Water* to the fiveplayer online squad coop of *Unreal Tournament* mod *Blue Moon Rising*. Innovation winner *Pixel Dust* continued the idea with its two-character platformer. The other winners of the main £2,000 prize were City Scrawlaz, who pushed the envelope of webgaming with a Flash-based urban graffiti game, while *Fizzle*, somewhat ironically, took the £1,000 teamwork award for its frantic fourplayer party game.

"The standard of work was unbelievably high," said Xbox account manager **Adrian Curry**, one of the competition judges. "The teams have shown real professionalism and commitment in developing these concepts in an extremely short period of time."

"The standard of work was unbelievably high. The teams have shown real professionalism and commitment developing these concepts"

Members of Dare's Irish team get to grips with Innovation-winning platformer *Pixel Dust*. Team winners received cash prizes, with individual winners carrying away an Xbox each

If they want to take their idea forward, winning teams have the opportunity to go into Abertay's incubation program, which currently contains three teams from previous competitions who are working on commercialising their ideas (see 'Keeping the dream alive'). Competition within the industry for talented students means the majority of graduates are likely to find themselves being offered the chance to be professional developers come October, however. For example, members of last year's winning teams were quickly picked up by Electronic Arts.





Since its inception in 2000, Dare To Be Digital gets better every year. With graffiti themes and an anticorporate stance, City Scrawlaz's game (played above) was the Creativity winner





Fourplayer party game *Fizzle* proved to be a popular choice with attendees, young and old, of the award ceremony

Keeping the dream alive

It took the four members of Hiding Buffalo a mere ten weeks to win Dare 2002, but since then it has been a rocky two years getting their *Gumshoe* detective noir game released. Starting out as a standard 3D adventure PC game, the project has become a point-and-click browser-based game. "Publishers just weren't interested," explained **Niclas Kjellin**, one of the three remaining members. "We had to rethink how we could get the game out there." The result is *Gumshoe Online*. Currently in beta testing at www.gumshoe-online.com, the game is expected to go live in November. Mixing an online subscription model with book publishing, each chapter of the game will be released for £5.



Capcom's Joe triumphs again

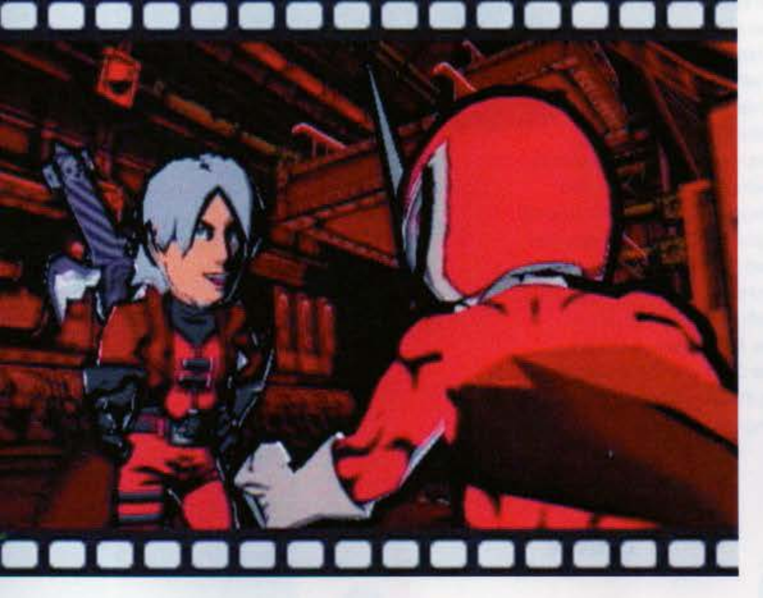
**iewtiful stands tall among stiff competition
o win the first Edge People's Choice award**

A year on from winning the **Edge** Award at ECTS 2003, Capcom's unlikeliest ero has triumphed again. Voted for by aders of **Edge** and visitors to the Go Play ames Exhibition at the Edinburgh ternational Games Festival, *Joe* squeaked win against strong competition from *rince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* and *roject Gotham Racing 2*.

The award was designed to reward games released in the last year which exhibited innovation or excellence, and the shortlist also included titles such as *In Memoriam* and *Katamari Damacy*. As well as the public vote, there was also a jury vote, presented at the festival itself. The jury was comprised of notable members of the videogame industry – developers, academics and journalists – and part of the idea was to see if their opinions matched those of the gaming community at large. The answer, it seems, is no. *VJ* fared much worse at the hands of the jury and their choice, *Made In Wario*, didn't even make the public top three.

At a time when many commentators are bemoaning the conservatism of the games industry, it's encouraging to see such a bold and inventive game receiving so much popular support. Those who greeted the news of the game's peculiar name with scorn are hopefully revising their opinions.

Many thanks to all those who voted. Handsome crystal doorstops are on the way to the *Viewtiful Joe* team (now Clover Studio) along with your, and our, congratulations.





If you missed *Joe* on GC or at Go Play Games in Edinburgh (above) you can catch up with its rerelease on PS2 soon

CUTTINGS



Unlucky seven for Acclaim

After months of rumours, Acclaim has shut down all its studios and filed for bankruptcy. Rather than the predicted Chapter 11, a process which allows companies in financial trouble time to restructure, Acclaim has requested the more final Chapter 7 liquidation. This hands the company's assets over to trustees who will oversee their distribution to creditors.

The company's downfall has seen inevitable since GMAC Commercial Finance, its main lender, refused it a new credit deal earlier on this summer.

Staff at all the publisher's studios have been made redundant, totalling over 600 employees. The news comes, frustratingly, at a point when Acclaim's future line-up was looking more promising than it had in months. There's no news yet on the fate of *The Red Star* (above), but *Juiced* should be able to seek a new publisher and there are suggestions that *Bard's Tale* may be picked up for European distribution by Vivendi, which is already publishing the game in the US.

Lucky three for Square Enix

In a flurry of announcements, Square Enix has released news of three new games. The extraordinarily named *The Dirge Of Cerberus* is confirmation of the long-rumoured sequel to *Final Fantasy VII*. The company will also be remaking the SNES RPG *Romancing Saga* for the PS2. Lastly, as part of its rapidly growing online portfolio, first details have surfaced of a new MMORPG called *Fantasy Earth: The Ring of Dominion*.

ecently reviewed

A rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Doom 3	PC	Activision	id	7
Burnout 3: Takedown	PS2, Xbox	Electronic Arts	Criterion Games	9
The Sims 2	PC	Electronic Arts	Maxis	8
Second Sight	GC, PS2, Xbox	Codemasters	Free Radical	7
Tales Of Symphonia	GC	Namco	In-house	8
Conflict: Vietnam	PC, PS2, Xbox	SCi	Pivotal Games	5
Tenchu Kurenai	PS2	From Software	K2/From software	6
Headhunter: Redemption	PS2, Xbox	Sega	Amuze	5
DJ: Decks & Effects	PS2	SCEE	Relentless	5
U-Move Super Sports	PS2	Konami	In-house	5
Ape Escape EyeToy	PS2	SCEI	In-house	7



Doom 3



Burnout 3



The Sims 2



Tales Of Symphonia

Real 3D returns to agenda

After a number of false starts, displays are finally taking practical steps into the third dimension

www.sharp3d.com
www.kodak.com/go/3d
www.dur.ac.uk/inthreed



Despite the billions poured into research, bringing the third dimension properly to the computer monitor has yet to be anything like a success. Even in the world of gaming, experiments such as Nintendo's ill-fated Virtual Boy and less-well-publicised follies such as a 3D goggle version of *Black & White* haven't captured the imagination, let alone the shop shelves. But that doesn't mean the wider electronics industry has given up on the notion.

Sharp, in particular, continues to push the technology, releasing 3D screens for laptops, mobile phones and last month its first desktop flatscreen monitor, the snappily named LL-151-3D. The hope is that this new wave of devices will gain widespread acceptance because they can provide 3D images without the need for goggles or the other peripherals that have dogged previous attempts.

The trick behind this technology is the addition of what Sharp calls a parallax barrier. This ensures different patterns of light reach the viewer's left and right eyes – the same stereoscopic effect produced by the three-inch separation between left and right eyes in reality. The brain can then get to work, processing the two image streams together to create a single experience with 3D depth information.

There are some limitations with Sharp's technology, of course. The extra cost is around ten per cent, and although the screen's 3D abilities can be toggled, it increases the power consumption when on – an issue for laptops and mobile devices. There's also the problem of the sweetspot. To get the correct effect, viewers have to be strictly positioned straight on to the centre of the screen. But what can't be denied is the technology's potential. While Sharp is targetting hardcore niches such as medical imaging, mapping, data analysis and design applications, there's the expectation that game companies will be keen to explore the possibilities, too.

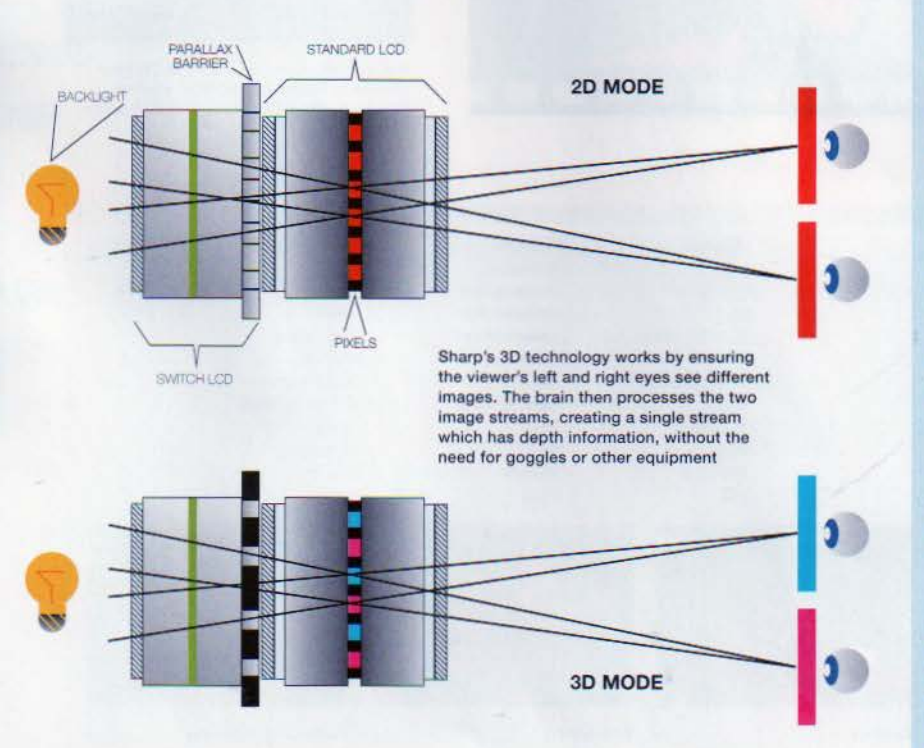
Another manufacturer looking specifically at such opportunities is Kodak, which launched a special edition of its 3D Stereo Display at the recent arcade-oriented iGames Expo held in New York. A dedicated unit, rather than a massmarket desktop item, the Kodak 3D Stereo Display uses a complex array of lenses and mirrors, plus two LCD panels, to create a high resolution (1,280x1,024) image with a wide 45°x36° field of view.

Unlike Sharp's technology, however, where applications have to be developed specifically to take advantage of the 3D screen's abilities, the Kodak display is compatible with standard PC games, so long as the PC is running a dual-display graphics card with appropriate drivers. At iGames, for example, *NASCAR Thunder 2004* and *Call Of Duty* were among the games demoed in full 3D using the system.





Many monitor manufacturers are pushing 3D-enabled screens. Having already produced laptop and mobile phone screens, Sharp has just released the LL-151-3D – its first desktop 3D monitor, while Kodak is also getting in on the act with its two-screen 3D Stereo Display



Sharp's 3D technology works by ensuring the viewer's left and right eyes see different images. The brain then processes the two image streams, creating a single stream which has depth information, without the need for goggles or other equipment

Creating the new vision

As with game consoles, so with 3D screens: it's software that sells hardware, and while plenty of 3D monitors are becoming available, the same can't be said for 3D-enabled content. And that's where inThreeD hopes to fill the gap. Based within the University of Durham's computer science department – and part funded by Codeworks, the region's digital investment agency – the company is working on a toolkit to enable content developers to create 3D applications. Heading up the project is **Nick Holliman**, himself a one-time Codemasters employee.

"There are very few tools available at present," he explains. "And it's quite hard to get 3D content to work well. Controlling depth of field is particularly important because you don't want to be moving the point of focus around too quickly, as that's the sort of thing which causes headaches."

Another big problem is a lack of standardisation with respect to screens. "While Sharp has one approach, other companies have different display technologies and we need to be able to handle them all," Holliman explains.

But despite these teething troubles, he remains enthusiastic about the future. "We don't walk around with a patch over our eyes saying: 'I'm only going to see in 2D today'," he points out. "It should be normal for us to see in 3D whether it's on our computer screens or not."

www.quazal.com

Making sense of online gaming

uazal's lobby servicing toolkit Rendez-Vous is making it easier for ublishers to carve out their own piece of online gaming real estate

t has always been tempting for technology companies to try to cross e boundary that separates them from ontent creators and publishers. vidia's current marketing strategy for C games is one interesting example, hile the early days of RenderWare ggered an internal debate about the lue of getting licensees to add a logo the back of the game box. But for ost tech companies involvement in nsumer affairs is considered a angerous waste of time and resources.

That's certainly the case for anadian networking specialist Quazal. aving quietly built its reputation with e console-based Net-Z and Eterna, a assively multiplayer networking toolkit, latest release, the online lobby ervice Rendez-Vous, seems certain to eep the company in the shade, no atter how successful it is. And eveloper relations manager **Mike rummelsmith** isn't concerned one bit.

"The whole point of Rendez-Vous is at publishers can use it to create their own online branding. It's not an area we want to get involved with," he explains.

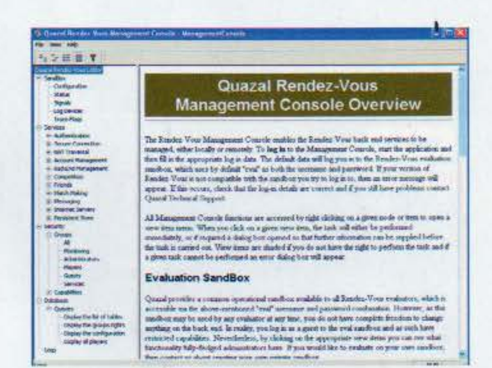
With connectivity now an integral part of console gaming's future, control and branding of the online infrastructure is becoming an increasingly important issue for publishers. As an example, it took EA over a year to hammer out an agreement with Microsoft over the way its games worked on Xbox Live. And, outside of Microsoft's proprietary system, publishers are thinking hard about how they can ensure a smooth online experience as well as retaining their audiences, particularly within their ongoing franchises.

Part of the solution is good cross-platform networking code, which can deal with the vagaries of the internet as well as reducing the cost of servers and bandwidth as much as possible. That's where Quazal's Net-Z, which can handle PlayStation2, GameCube and PC together, as well as Xbox, comes into play.

But more than this often-invisible technology, it's seemingly trivial services such as authentication, matchmaking, buddylists, account management and in-game messaging that are now being seen as key to a successful online game. And it's in this environment that Rendez-Vous' vanilla status becomes so attractive to publishers, particularly as its biggest lobby service competitor comes from GameSpy, which is itself a major consumer brand in the online gaming world.

"Everyone we spoke to either said they wanted an alternative, or simply thought that competition in this market would be healthy. I think it'll be pretty obvious that there's plenty of room for two providers," states Drummelsmith.

And the decision already seems to be paying off, with Eidos using both Net-Z and Rendez-Vous in four of its upcoming games, including *Backyard Wrestling 2* and *25 To Life*. Quazal is also in talks with a number of other publishers about licensing the technology.

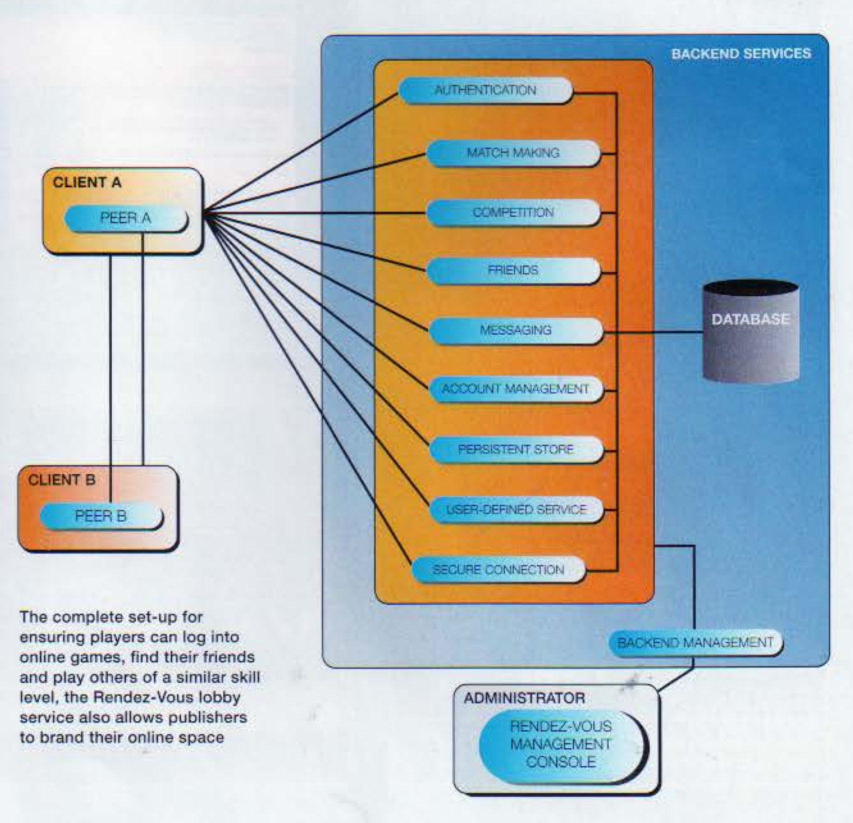


Rendez-Vous is available for GameCube, PC and PlayStation2 as well as Xbox, where it supports all the features of Xbox Live 3.0, making feature-matching across all platforms as straightforward as possible





e first publisher to sign up to e Quazal's Rendez-Vous lobby rvice is Eidos, which is using e product in four forthcoming mes including *Backyard restling 2* and *25 To Life*



The complete set-up for ensuring players can log into online games, find their friends and play others of a similar skill level, the Rendez-Vous lobby service also allows publishers to brand their online space

OUT THERE

REPORTAGE



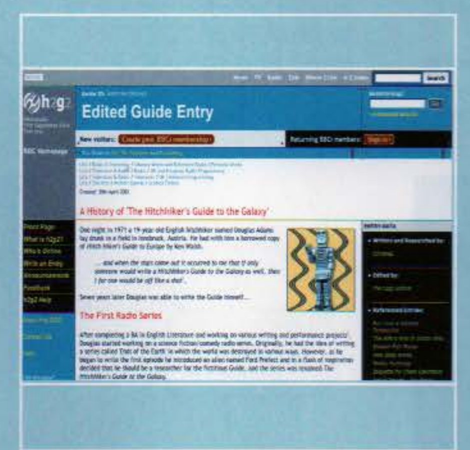


No need to panic: Arthur, Ford, Slartibartfast and co are returning in a new series and film. And the game is online



Mark Wing-Davey (Zaphod), Richard Griffiths (Slartibartfast) and Simon Jones (Arthur)







Let's be honest: your SNES sessions (using original kit, not emus, naturally) have been missing wireless pads



01 Remember the Babelfish puzzle?

Earth: With the film being well into production at Elstree Studios, and three new series of the radio show in the can, it's a good time to be a fan of Douglas Adams' Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy trilogy. Even better news: to celebrate the return of the radio series, the BBC is to resurrect Infocom's old *Hitchhiker's Guide* adventure game on the radio show's website. For those too young to remember, the game sees you taking the role of Arthur Dent, and guides you through a similar (but, frustratingly for those who would use the trilogy as a walkthrough, not that similar) path to the book. It's a brutal game, full of sudden death and frustrating puzzles, but it's also full of excellent writing by the much-missed Adams, and so long as you manage to collect the dust from underneath the bed at the start, you'll be fine.

02 Wires are so last century

US: "Messiah is uniting the gaming of the past with the technology of the future, bringing you the accessories of today." That's a pretty fancy way of saying, "Dude! We've just made some wireless SNES pads! And, holy crap, some NES ones, too! You can totally come buy them if you want, only $29.99 plus shipping for a pair of them in a super neat silver lunchbox, and you get a dog tag, too! Cool!"

In truth, they *are* pretty cool, although we can't see that much of a market for them beyond wirephobic Nintendo fanboys. Still, if you're one of them, go to www.playmessiah.com. You can buy Messiah trucker hats, too, although we're not sure whether that's past, present, or future chic, or simply not chic, ever, ever, ever at all. Hmm.

Soundbytes

"Part of the thrust of the piece is that gaming is not just for kids. We want to establish the way Playboy's going to be covering videogames, from the perspective of an adult who has a life."
Playboy's senior editor, Scott Alexander, on Gaming Grows Up

"Playing a game puts you into an altered state. It's like a runner's high, where athletes are aware they are doing well. They not sure what they are doing, but they know they are functioning at their peak."
Dr Jeremy Thornton reveals some of the University of Hull's research into gaming. Consider 'the zone' clinically defined, then

"I wouldn't hazard to look too far ahead. I'm definitely going to see through this round of rendering work. I wouldn't make any promises beyond that."
A gaming industry without John Carmack? Expect PC hardware stocks to crash if id's next project is his last

Gaming grows up: part one

s: Those **Edge** readers who don't already have a subscription to ayboy – and we'd imagine that's quite a few, given the amount uh, articles you can read on the internet – might want to pick the October issue for tits and giggles. Why? Because this is eir Gaming Grows Up issue, which illustrates just how far gaming s grown up by depicting several gaming 'babes' inside with their gital kit off. More reminiscent of doodling on the inside of an olescent boy's history folder than actual pornography, the nderings depict characters from *Mortal Kombat*, *Bloodrayne*, e new *Leisure Suit Larry* title and, obviously, *Playboy: The ansion*. "Hopefully the purists won't get too bent out of shape. is is just the next version of the pinup," says Playboy's senior itor **Scott Alexander**. Oh, we're sure they'll be fine with it, Scott.

Gaming grows up: part two

ong Kong: Everyone knows the internet has made it easier than ery to get a girlfriend – why, what girl in her right mind would use you, particularly when you sent her that Photoshopped lf-portrait jpeg of Brad Pitt's face on, uh, Brad Pitt's body? But ait: why go to all that effort when Artificial Life is offering a virtual lfriend to download to your mobile phone? Pay attention, cause this is genius: like a Tamagotchi for lonely adults with too uch money, people pay Artificial Life to have the girlfriend on their one, then pay again for gifts to keep her happy. Fail to buy her ough stuff and she'll start to sulk. Why, it's just like a real internet ationship, only without the possibility of a crushingly sappointing trip overseas at the end of it all.

See more at www.artificial-life.com

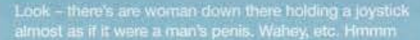
Food for thought

K: Out There's gaming-does-good story of the month comes this ne from Playerthree, a London-based game developer working a videogame on behalf of the World Food Programme. ended to educate children about the problems (and root uses) of world hunger, the story arc takes players to the heart of drought in a fictional country torn apart by civil war. There, they rticipate in educational mini-games of varying genres; dropping od parcels in appropriate locations, perhaps, or managing sources in a *Sim City* style. It's unlikely that the Daily Mail will t this one on their front page, but it's an interesting and noble use, and will be available as a free download from ww.wfp.org later in the year.

Data Stream Need for speed run

Time to completion:	
Metroid:	0:29:19
Metroid 2:	1:02:29
Super Metroid:	0:36:00
Metroid Fusion:	0:50:00
Metroid Prime:	1:04:00
Metroid Zero Mission:	0:29:54
Super Mario 64:	0:26:42
Super Mario Bros 3:	0:11:15
Super Mario RPG:	3:57:00
Yoshi's Island:	2:28:40

Source: Planetquake.com



Look – there's are woman down there holding a joystick almost as if it were a man's penis. Wahey, etc. Hmmm







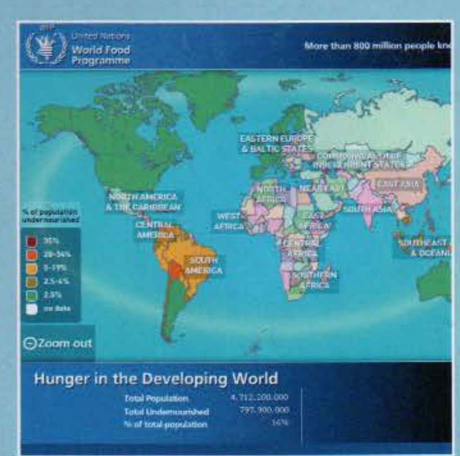


If you've tried online dating and you still haven't been able to find a real mate, electronic alternatives are here





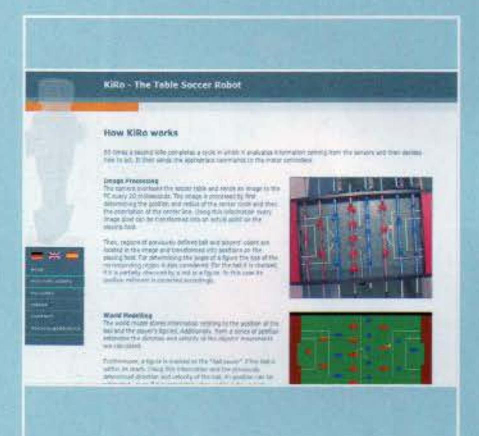
Learn about world hunger and how to tackle it with this game. Expect to see no tabloid newspaper coverage of it





We'd like to see this used on the annoying tosspots you always find playing table football in the pubs of Bath









Movies and mp3s on a GBA? It'd be like having a PSP, only now. And with all the advantages of the GBA. Erm...




The Screenplay SD event will allow you to play and discuss games and the big gaming issues of today



06 Kiro Kiro Kirorin

Germany: The problem with twoplayer games is that they require friends, something that's often in short supply if you're a journalist working a handful of the hours the gods send to bring your readers bribe-laden exclusives. It's particularly a problem if you're as big a fan of table football as we are, so thank those benevolent gods for Kiro, a table soccer robot developed in Germany as part of research into the foundations of robotics and AI. Kiro plays a pretty mean game – you can see a video at www.informatik.uni-freiburg.de/~kiro/english/index.html – but then you'd kind of expect it to, what with it being a mean, uncaring robot that checks the game field 50 times a second with the sole intention of making you look bad in front of your friends. Not that friends are a problem if you have Kiro, because you don't need them. Hooray!

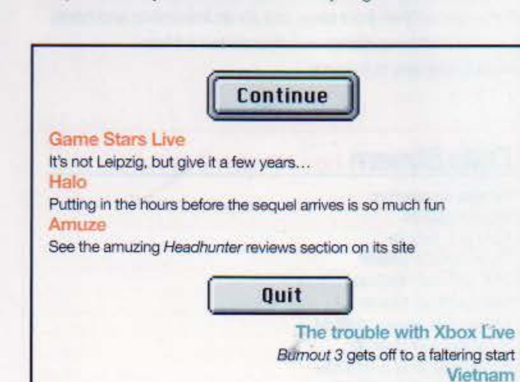
07 Media piracy is theft

Hong Kong: We have mentioned Xbox Media Center's life-changing capabilities before, but if there's one thing Microsoft's machine isn't capable of, it's portability. Sony's PSP, on the other hand, will be able to play movies on the go – but why wait, when you can order a GBA Movie Player today? The $30 (£17) device takes Compact Flash cards and delivers a range of multimedia playback options – movies, mp3s, ebooks, and, if you order from Lik-Sang, some unspecified 'homebrew emulation software' that's rumoured to be a NES emulator.

Visit www.lik-sang.com for more information, but remember, kids: use this device for the power of good.

08 Screenplay SD

Nottingham: Welcoming 'anyone with an interest in game culture' – which should be the lot of you, really – Screenplay SD's next event is on October 7. It offers a variety of delights: Prof Mark Griffiths will be speaking on game addiction, game-inspired electronica will be performed by Vastik Root and Bury and Disisnter, and a selection of some of the most addictive games will be there for your perusal. Sometimes-hairy but always-attractive **Edge** stalwart Jon Jordan will also be exhibiting his very special photographic delights, so there's little excuse for you not to attend, particularly as it's free. Head to the Broadway Cinema for 8.30pm, and say hello to Jordan when you get there.


Continue

Game Stars Live
It's not Leipzig, but give it a few years...
Halo
Putting in the hours before the sequel arrives is so much fun
Amuze
See the amuzing *Headhunter* reviews section on its site

Quit

The trouble with Xbox Live
Burnout 3 gets off to a faltering start
Vietnam
Yep, that'll do now, thanks
Playboy's renderings
Wow. Seriously, wow



MEDIA

Singularity Sky

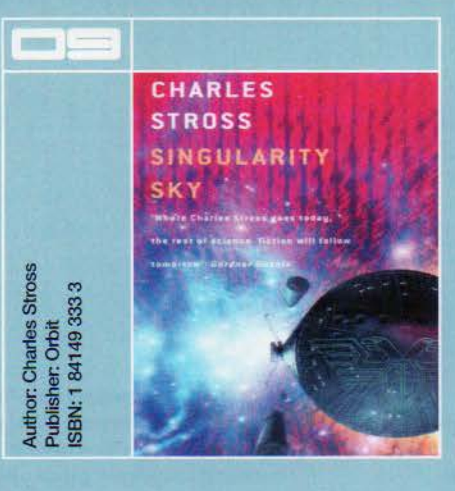
e biggest explosion in the book industry over the past decade s been the number of first timers trying to fight their way into e system. It's got so bad agents won't even look at unsolicited anuscripts any more. Which makes you wonder what leverage arles Stross has over his friends in high places? -pharmacist, software engineer and freelance journalist (the nger sign's right there), his debut full-scale novel, Singularity y, follows in the wake of groundbreaking UK sci-fi from Richard organ, Stephen Baxter and Alastair Reynolds, mixing the sharp ges of conceptual science, the pulp noir of the galactic tsider and a dollop of Chomsky agitpol, but sadly this is where e comparisons stop. Instead of ending up with a hard interstitial oy, where component parts combine into a fearsome solid, ngularity Sky is more like your gran's trifle – most of the right gredients, only mixed in the wrong measure and with a slightly ggy base. The biggest disappointment is that it starts well. backward proto-Soviet space colony is attacked by an tomatic information distributive node civilisation, throwing gether our heroes – spaceship-engineer-cum-secret-agent artin Springfield and UN special operative Rachel Mansour. at they ditch their mutual suspicion, fall madly in love, avoid e terrible results as the trot-luddites attack the distributive node d end up escaping ready to undertake new adventures is mething of a given. Unfortunately, ignoring a smart if mewhat prolonged trick involving the event horizon and time vel, that's pretty much it.

The Art Of Machinima

cording to an explanation that sounds remarkably like urban yth, Machinima – the creation of 'films' using game engines – ould actually be known as Machinema. As is the way with nail correspondence, however, an early misspelling shifted the cepted canon. Machinima was the result. Since that hiccup, e nascent artform has been working hard to push the undaries. Helped in particular by the non-commercial releases game engines such as Unreal, the success of the *Halo*-based d Vs Blue series as well as the presence of Mrs John armack at Fountainhead, one of the key Machinima producers, gaining momentum. Which is where Paul Marino's book mes into play. One of the principles of the award-winning ILL an, he's out to spread some of his expertise. Based around a nple tutorial structure and a certain amount of free software ovided on the accompanying CD (although you'll have to get a py of Unreal and UnrealEd for the advanced section), The Art Machinima takes you through the process of setting up enes, creating lighting, directing characters, setting up camera ntrol points as well as cinematic effects such as fades and film ain. There's also discussion of some of the traditional film- hool-style techniques, as well as standard 3D modelling tips. a lot to cover, of course, and as Marino himself points out, achinima's problem is increasingly becoming balancing the edom of medium with the complexity of the production ocess. Still, this makes for a great starting point.

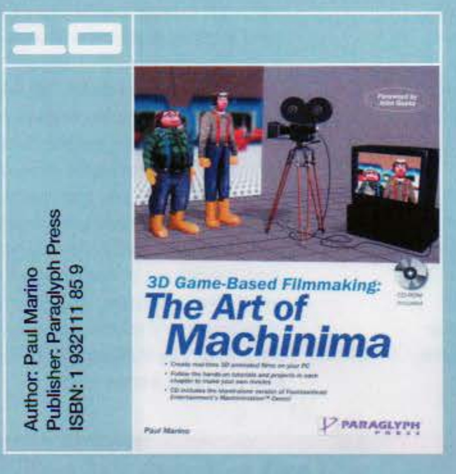
09

Author: Charles Stross
Publisher: Orbit
ISBN: 1 84149 333 3



10

Author: Paul Marino
Publisher: Paraglyph Press
ISBN: 1 932111 85 9



11



Site: OverClocked Remix
URL: www.ocremix.org

11 OverClocked Remix

There are countless sites devoted to game music, but few are as comprehensive as OverClocked Remix. The site aims to prove that '[videogame music] is not disposable or merely just background, but is as intricate, innovative and lasting as any other form', and offers countless modern-day reinterpretations of classic themes. A cursory dive through their archive will turn up countless vaguely familiar sonic masterpieces – and others, like a remix of the Asterix theme called 'Niggaz 4 Life', which are rather more unexpected.

12 Advertainment

Our antipodean chums are noted for their straightforward approach to life, something borne out in this advert for *Athens 2004* on PS2.



You'll get to like this chap. He has great screen presence, and a very expressive face, too




"Tonight, we're going to see a man in the tradition of Ned Kelly take gold for Australia!" He's very excited




"Crossing now to the gold medal final. Look at the determination in his eyes" Gotcha! Boom! Good shot!





"He can't miss! Let's put a blindfold on him and give the man a challenge!" Now there's a recipe for disaster




The shooter acknowledges the crowd… and it's back to our alarming new friend. Who's excited. Again




"You can't argue with a gun-totin' hero like this!" he cries, before pulling out a copy of the game and slamming it down on the desk. Still not exhausted by all this, he poses the question on everybody's lips: "How much gold have you won for Australia?" Well?



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

A sunny afternoon's shopping

In Game one afternoon – the House Of Games is closed, heartbreaker-for-hire Johnny Casino called out to rescue a gaggle of doe-eyed supermodels from a drug baron's explosive-rigged yacht (a situation not explicitly revealed, but inferred by the 'Johnny Casino Is Busy' note hastily taped to the shop door) – RedEye watches a small child consider the wide range of options offered to him by a display rack of *Medal Of Honor* titles. In the corner, the child's bored father flicks idly through a generic specialist magazine, before his eyes come to rest on a preview feature on *Sid Meier's Pirates*.

He's still reading it when his kid comes over, box in hand, decision made. "I want this one," he says, uncertainly. "What are you reading?" The father points at the title. "This was a game when I was your age. I guess there's a new one now." He takes the magazine across to the assistant at the counter. "Do you have this?" he asks. "That? That's not out for months…" scoffs the worker. "Weird," says Dad. "It reads just like an advertisement." True, true.

It gets RedEye thinking. Consider gaming's year zero as 1978, the year of *Space Invaders*, tales of Tokyo running out of ¥100 pieces, of tie-in merchandise and the first feelings of just how big this could really be. That's now more than a quarter of a century behind us, enough time to consider gaming in terms of a different type of generation – not hardware, but human. Many people who grew up playing videogames, lapsed or otherwise, have children now.

Example: look at Matthew Broderick's evolution from early-'80s thriller War Games, where he plays the bedroom coder whose love of games comes close to destroying the planet (Jack Thompson and fellow Rockstar baiters take note). From there he moves to Ferris, who begins his film by complaining that his parents got him a computer rather than a car. And then, eventually, via monkeys and monsters, to middle-aged parts: the bitter teacher, the cuckolded husband. We're all getting *old*.

To be fair, though, we've seen a lot, taken games through from the dot-dot-dash of mono-sprite destruction to the spectacular vice cities of vibrant, multi-dimensional now. Progress? Perhaps. We didn't have the power at the start, but we also had no idea of the limits. Home computing gave creative people a new palette with which to work; people who couldn't find an outlet at home, at school or at work, but were suddenly presented with a canvas.

So they began to create. The early '80s were full of videogame abstraction, lone coders without artists, without producers, without publishers, without budgets, struggling to get to grips with the form. Bits and bytes were a digital blizzard, programmers chucking snowballs at each other in the form of demos, squeezing every last inch out of their hardware, looking for new themes, new ideas, new dynamics. Much of the time they'd fall over, get lost in the drift. Other times they'd fall back on to something solid and make a snow angel.

The angels became established shapes for games, great at first, but less so with each iteration, copied and copied and copied until they lost all their magic. Eventually, they weren't just moulds, but rules: games had to be shaped like this or that or the other. We'd grown to love what we knew so much that we'd forgotten the freedom we once had. We'd grown as a business, but we'd grown up too fast.

Will the second gaming generation really be able to claim they've witnessed such diversity, or have we, the first, ruined it for them?

Still, we, the first gaming generation, we've seen a lot. *I, Robot* through *Deus Ex Machina*, *Bak 2 School* to *3D Deathchase*, *Chuckie Egg*, *Elite*, *Frankie Goes To Hollywood*, *Captain Blood* and *Damocles*. Jumpers for goalposts and all that, but will the second gaming generation really be able to claim they've witnessed such diversity, or have we, the first, ruined it for them with our frivolous obsession with the superficial, our need to play the same game over and over again in a slightly prettier dress? Perhaps not.

Talk to Will Wright about game design and he'll tell you how he believes that construction by committee doesn't work. *The Sims* was his idea, rubbished by colleagues and destroyed in focus-group testing, but the biggest commercial success videogaming has ever seen. It's a testament to his vision, sure, but it's also testament to the policy that EA – whose imposing in-store stands RedEye is still staring at, long after the father and son have left the shop – enacted, supporting one man's dream with a budget big enough to make it happen. It was rewarded well enough, but so was videogaming. It got broader.

Of course, you have to have a big enough budget to be able to take those sorts of risks in the first place, and there aren't many developers with that kind of capability. The innovation we need to survive and thrive is confined to the really big publishers, those who are already in commanding positions and who can only increase their income by growing the market. Look to the console manufacturers, then, and in particular to Sony, which has kept its userbase sated with Jak and *GT* et al, but also supported a wider gaming philosophy by publishing *EyeToy*, *Singstar*, *Ico*, *Rez* and *Frequency*.

Most of the game industry's return still goes into regurgitation, but more and more of it is going into the budgets of new creatives, kids heading back into the snowstorm and seeing what they can find. The old guard – RedEye's generation, or at least the people who made games for them – are getting old and moving on, and the new breed is moving up and taking over. They will direct the future, perhaps by petitioning for the return of old, underexplored franchises like *Pirates*, or perhaps by ditching our heritage entirely and sprinting for the new. Suddenly, that tired old Next Generation thing sounds refreshing again. RedEye smiles, runs a hand down the *Medal of Honor* stand, and ambles out of the store.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s. Email: whoisredeye@gmail.com*



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Finally, a frontier

Space used to be simple. Not necessarily the cosmic 'outer space' of sci-fi, just space, as in the space between my ears, or the space behind your sofa. The seductive voids of *Asteroids* or *Defender* conjured infinities of space with a simple lack of luminescence as they implied a limitless Z-axis. Space meant potential for movement; a stage on which to enact your own choreography of lasers and whirling dodges. Both *Asteroids* and *Defender* offered a risky hyperspace option, in which you might zap to safety or into the middle of a rock or mutant: the discontinuity of this option really served, by contrast, to enhance the feeling of flow and smoothness.

In the transition to modern 3D worlds, space itself changed. Where once it was nearly a character in its own right, an inky, velvety blanket, now it is just distance. You can no longer see it. But it's just as important, it's where you live. Say there are two kinds of videogame space: cosmetic space and functional space. Cosmetic space makes up the largest volume of environments: it's that space above your head when you are on foot and there are no ladders or aircraft to get up there. It's that little nook between ventilation pipes that you can't squeeze into. It's the other side of that courtyard at night, where the designers stipulate you will never go. Functional space, on the other hand, is the space in which you can move. The blank paper on which you write your adventures.

Clearly, the interplay between cosmetic and functional spaces, and the relative volumes of each, can differ widely across games. One of the hallmarks of a good exploration game, for instance, is the way it teases you as to the particular species of space you are witnessing: intriguing spaces appear cosmetic when you first see them but may actually turn out to be functional, once you find a way of getting there. This is true of *Tomb Raider* and *Ico*, for instance. The converse is one of the prime videogame sins, when space that looks as though it should be functional turns out to be merely cosmetic. A slit in a rock which you can't get into because the game won't allow you to turn sideways or a meaningless hut with painted-on doors.

Of course, cosmetic space has an aesthetic value; to create a sense of awe and vastness, or merely to fill in atmosphere. After all, the other side of that courtyard needs to be drawn even if you're not going there. Functional space, meanwhile, can be more or less successful at creating an arena of compelling action. The puzzle-spaces of *Tomb Raider*, *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* or *Mario 64*; the wide-open beach studded with hillocks and shrubs of the D-day-esque landing in *Halo*; or the lush vegetation and rippling shallow waters of *Far Cry* – each is richly functional and creates a deep sense of strategic possibility.

My reason for insisting on this distinction of terms is that critical terms like 'level design' or 'environment' or 'architecture' refer to the whole world of the videogame, but beautiful and dazzling environments can have impoverished functional spaces, making them less interesting than worlds which aren't as pretty but are more fun to be in. Here we come, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, to the prime exhibit for the prosecution: *Doom 3*.

'What exactly is wrong with this game?' I kept asking myself. Sure, the fact that you have to switch torch for weapon and back again is annoying, and there's no excuse to defend it, as some have done, on the grounds that this arbitrary restriction is no more 'unrealistic' than the fact you are fighting demons, or by saying that this is ordinarily a well-lit facility so why would anyone think of having night-vision goggles or firearms with built-in lights. It's a marine base, people, which means the soldiers would expect to be sent to locations outside the base on missions where perhaps it might be dark. The restriction makes no sense in the game's own terms.

Stupid though it is, however, it's a quirk which you can decide to buy into if you are determined to enjoy the game's undoubted ghost-train thrills. What is harder to forgive is the fact that *Doom 3* is perhaps the game most obsessed with cosmetic space at the expense of functional space that I have ever seen. All the exquisitely beautiful solid texturing, the pipes and cables on the walls, the nooks and crannies, the gorgeously modelled machinery – all this defines a massively complex cosmetic space in room after room. Functionally, however, you are most of the time running around a series of small boxes, trying to shoot monsters.

This would be bad enough – a bit like playing *Robotron* on a screen one-eighth the size, at about a third of the speed – but then we come to the issue of teleporting enemies. Shoot the two demons in front of you and, time after time, another one appears behind your back. It's good for shock tactics, but it destroys the strategic functionality of the game's space.

If a monster can appear from anywhere, it makes no difference where you position yourself. It's easy to see how teleporting enemies would utterly destroy *Robotron*'s playability, because the functional space in which you enact strategies would just become mercilessly unpredictable. If the rocks in *Asteroids* could use your hyperspace option, the game would break. So in *Doom 3*, the combination of small rooms and teleporting enemies – despite the odd pillar or crate – tends to void the game's space of any real meaning. This has the effect of compromising my immersion. As soon as the demons appear I might as well be anywhere, wheeling around, running and pounding on my mouse button. The space doesn't matter.

In the transition to modern 3D worlds, space itself changed. Where once it was nearly a character in its own right, now it is just distance

The irrational space of *Doom 3* runs counter to the current laudable tendency of increasing the functional interest of game-spaces. A single block of *Full Spectrum Warrior* holds more functional interest than whole kilometres of *Doom 3*'s corridors, and situates you firmly in a believable and challenging virtual space. *Doom 3* defenders may reply that it is supposed to be an old-school shoot 'em up, not a tactical sim. That's no excuse. Old-school shoot 'em ups didn't have normal mapping, but knew what to do with space.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: steven_poole@mac.com





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi

Los Angeles chronicles

This month's column has very little to do with videogames (I can sense you rolling your eyes already), but I'd like to tell you about it. You see, a little while ago, I went to Los Angeles. I was accompanied with one member of my staff, a very nice guy named Sato.

Of course, we went to LA for work in relation to one of my projects. Not to go surfing. Anyway, it was incredibly hot, even now in September. It was nearly the very same temperature as it was in May, when I attended E3, and as I told you last month, I dislike hot weather.

We planned to stay in LA for only three days. We worked smoothly, there was no problem. On the last day, we only had to think about getting ready for our flight back to Japan. We checked out of our hotel and went across to the rental car office. Sato went into the office to ask the clerk the following simple question: "Can you tell me where the shuttle bus station for the airport is?" It should have been a simple question, but it was just the beginning of a remarkable chain of events.

The clerk was standing still, not saying anything, just moving his head to say: "No." I thought this was very strange. Anyway, Sato tried again. "Is there a problem?" he asked.

Then the man started to say something. Then a conversation started between them. What did they speak about? Well, since I'm not very good at English (can you tell?), I was just looking at them, watching them talking. Then, after a few minutes of conversation, it was Sato's turn to move his head in a way that told me he was clearly puzzled by what the man said to him. Then I needed to know what was going on and I asked him: "What's wrong?" He had a very pessimistic look on his face when replying to me.

"He just told me that there was a terrorist attack at the airport…" he said.

"What?! Are you sure this is not a joke?" I asked. But he looked quite positive about what the man told him. "Well, I'm pretty sure this is true. What are we going to do?"

Anyway, I decided to check this information and eventually I got more details. So we went together to check again with the rental car office clerk. When we arrived at the counter there were already a lot of other travellers massed around a television set. They were all anxious to learn about what was happening at the airport.

We joined these people and watched the television to learn more about the event. What we figured out, looking at the live transmission, was that the travellers and airport staff had been instructed to evacuate the airport while the security officers were inspecting the installation for a possible suspect element – a suspect package or some unattended luggage, or something. That was all. There was no actual terrorist attack, not yet. Still we stood there, watching the television, and we were not getting any further details about the situation. We did nothing and waited for 30 minutes but nothing new, no additional information came from anywhere.

Everywhere, people were complaining, saying: "That's a problem for us." "What are we going to do?" "Planes may not leave the airport today." I myself had a very important meeting set up for when I returned to Tokyo. If the situation continued like this, I was going to miss it.

In the meantime, we decided to go to a restaurant near the hotel to get something to eat. We were very hungry since we had been planning to eat at the airport. At the hotel, people were busy talking about what was happening at the airport. I mean absolutely *everybody* was talking about what was going on. Near us, there was a Japanese businessman, and he was wondering about what to do. He said he was thinking about going all the way to the airport at Long Beach to fly to San Francisco just in order to catch a flight back to Japan.

It's true that this plan would have taken us back to Japan too, but I'm pretty sure that there were many, many people thinking the very same thing. So I thought we would not be able to get back like this. In fact, it sounded like a very painful way of doing things. It was better to stay where we were. I preferred to call back to Japan. "Yeah, and that is why tomorrow I may not be able to be at the meeting," I told my office. Waiting for the situation to get back to normal at the airport, we spent our time at the hotel.

After three hours had passed, the waitress from the restaurant at the hotel called us: "The situation is clear at the airport!" she said. This was the news we had been waiting eagerly for! We quickly grabbed a taxi and headed back to the airport.

Unsurprisingly, it was incredibly crowded. The staff were busy carrying out their embarkation and security tasks, checking passports and tickets and booking luggage on to the planes. But after four more hours, we were finally on the plane back to Japan. To be honest, being in the plane was already miraculous and we were very happy about our situation.

Then we arrived in Japan at Narita airport. The following day, someone at Sega talked to me on the way to the meeting: "Hey, I called you last week but you were not available. Where the hell did you go?"

"I was, you know, there was that terrorist alert and…" I was unable to finish that sentence.

"What?!" He uttered this very loud exclamation which naturally dragged people's attention to us. "What the hell… Are you all right? I hope nothing happened to you!"

"I was, you know, there was that terrorist alert and…" I was unable to finish that sentence. "What?!" He uttered this very loud exclamation

"No, it was just a painful moment. But hopefully no problem for us," I assured him. That wasn't the end of it, however.

He had this bizarre answer: "Thank God you managed to escape alive!" I felt strange about his attitude. Then I realised: he had mistaken what had happened to us at LA for the horrible terrorist attack in Russia where many people and kids where slaughtered at the school. But what the hell would I have been doing in Russia?

See you!

Toshihiro Nagoshi is general manager of Sega's Creative Center division. His games include the Super Monkey Ball *series and* Daytona USA

As it was for many of us, the original *Doom* was a seminal moment of lewdness in my gaming experience. Even though I was forced to play it within a tiny window and on a giant sloth of a PC, it nevertheless heralded a seismic shift in what I expected from a game. It was the gaming equivalent of a meteor thumping down in the Bay of Mexico; the ensuing nuclear winter rendered the gaming dinosaurs extinct. Only the strong, the violent, the 3D survived.

You might therefore assume I'd been getting in an unholy lather in the run up to *Doom 3*'s release, and you'd be right. Yet I successfully prevented the potential 'release' of any 'unholy lather' of my own thanks to the benefit of experience. I may view my ten years of reviewing games as a mostly wasted decade, but those years taught me one valuable lesson: hype is never justified.

We've been hearing about *Doom 3* for at least three years now, and like ghastly saps we voraciously devoured every morsel of news that trilled forth from id's vacillating udders. Every screenshot and interview quote and wedge of leaked code merely reinforced our otherwise abstract conviction that this was to have an effect on the gaming landscape akin to the effect a baseball bat has on a tramp's spine.

Yet now *Doom 3* has been and gone in the blink of a severed eyelid, and the most generous thing you could say was that it's the best-looking game of all time. Once you scrape away the revolting graphics, you're left with a stick-thin waif of a firstperson shooter, boasting all the sex appeal of a four stone, vomit-covered bulimic.

You could sit and debate the ludicrous design decision not to have the torch activated at the same time as your gun. You could go on about the fact that it's almost an insult to the legacy of the classic games, in that the actual design is so basic and backward-thinking (not to mention derivative) as to have all the structural integrity of couscous. You could point out that having the enemies teleport into the levels is a lazy and artificial way of generating scares (I far more enjoyed the early levels' stumbling undead than the later supernatural cyber-demon things). But all of that is to dwell on the obvious.

Frankly, it's id's Be Here Now; layers of bombastic production concealing a fairly flimsy product. Evidently, so much time was spent on the visuals – and, without a shadow of a doubt, from the sheer technical brilliance to the level of set design they really are the best graphics ever seen in a game – that they forgot to actually include a game in there. Yeah, all those audio and video logs and the like add to the sense of immersion, but they're not gameplay. They're DVD extras.

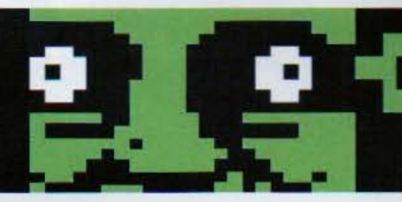
The initial reaction to *Doom 3* (curiously, Be Here Now was also Oasis' third album) was unanimously euphoric. Indeed, only **Edge** was willing to hail the game as anything less than the Second Coming. It's almost as if people so badly wanted the game to be as brilliant as they'd told themselves it would be that they were refusing to confront the reality; the reality that *Doom 3* is polished and accomplished, but as far as games go it's merely OK. Oh, of course now you can hear the mutterings that the emperor has no pants, and you can see his dangly-ding-dong, but where were they in the weeks surrounding release?

And yet, as disappointed as I was, it was my own fault for buying it. I didn't read any reviews. I knew they would be thoroughly gushing, regardless of how awful the game may or may not have been. Bitter experience has told me how hype works, especially as far as the gaming media goes, and that tempered the downer. Yet I still wanted to play it, and therefore only had myself to blame when it turned out to be a dud. In this instance, the reviews were inconsequential; they could've said *Doom 3* would give my PC herpes and I'd still have bought it. Just like I bought Be Here Now. But the reception given to the album by the media was the final straw as far as music reviews go. I tend to trust the opinions of Amazon buyers far more than Q, and Uncut, and NME.

Putting *Doom 3* aside, *Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay* is another story. Garnering almost universally positive reviews, telling me this was the best Xbox game since *Halo*, and that it had the 'BeST xBOx gRAffiX evaaaR!!!!!', what else could I do but buy it? Alas, it turned out to have very average graphics, grim, angular, uninspired architecture, and some truly rubbish monsters, while the gameplay was repetitive and turgid. All that to-ing and fro-ing, and talking to people – while going against the grain of most firstperson shooters – simply served to sap momentum from proceedings. And don't get me started from the absurdly dull fist fights.

I guess the alarm bells should've been ringing when most of the reviews pointed out how great the voice-acting was (that's akin to a film reviewer saying: 'The film had some really good props').

So, anyway, *Riddick* is unqualified rubbish. Just like those other 99.64544-out-of-ten-rated games *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic* and *Red Dead Revolver* – both of which I also bought on the strength of the enthusiastic reviews.



BIFFOVISION

Page 30, press hold, and reveal. Digitiser's founder speaks out

I only trust myself

So, that's at least three times this year I've bought disappointing games on the strength of magazine critique. That's roughly £115 wasted on the strength of other peoples' opinions.

Conversely, I bought that EA James Bond game, *Everything Or Nothing*, and that was also rubbish. Likewise *Shadow Ops: Red Mercury*. Both may have been crapulous, but they were impulse purchases, and at no point did I sit there playing them through gritted teeth (in *Everything Or Nothing*'s case I may have lobbed the occasional handful of faeces at the screen, but that's another story).

So, anyway, the upshot of all this is that I'm finally done as far as reviews are concerned. I'm no longer prepared to spend a large amount of money off the back of an opinion. I'll make my own mistakes from now on, thanks. I'll spend the money I would've spent on a games magazine to rent out a couple of games for two nights, and make up my own mind.

It's as if people so badly wanted the game to be as brilliant as they'd told themselves it would be they were refusing to confront the reality

Mr Biffo is a semi-retired videogame journalist whose opinions are just as useless as anyone's

dge's most wanted

nji

difficult first solo title from Yoshiki *Street Fighter II* amoto's Game Republic, we're hoping this action has the moves to match its gold-tinted looks.

(PS2) Sony



TOR2: The Sith Lords

ie's (a)morality plays have us longing to feel the ght of planet-crushing, light-extinguishing sequence behind our foolishly selfish actions.

(PC, Xbox) LucasArts



go Star Wars

not an equation that needs explaining, but if Star rs and Lego are on one side of the equals sign, n light-headed, all-consuming need is on the other.

(PC, PS2, Xbox) Eidos



dworld Stranger

e hints dropped by Lorne Lanning at EGN have etted already ravenous appetites even further for p to what he's called 'Oddworld's Nicaragua'.

(PS2, Xbox) Electronic Arts



Shoebox gazing

Why games need more sex and less porn

Over the years, this page has paid tribute to – and expressed bafflement about – the bizarre merchandising tat sent to game magazines. This month's consignment raised more eyebrows than most: a handsome shoebox containing a tube of K-Y Jelly, a pair of latex gloves, three flavoured condoms (two banana, one strawberry) and a copy of Penthouse. It was an interesting lesson in videogaming's attitude towards sex, but not for the reasons you might think.

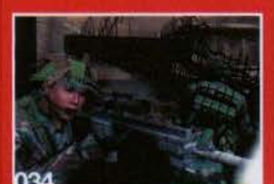
The first lesson was how the industry is changing internally. This goodie bag wasn't a grubby boy's club gloat – the head of PR at the (nameless, to spare their blushes) publisher involved is a woman. And, while the box went to female journalists as well as male, they received a copy of Lady Chatterly's Lover to get their teeth into. It may be commendable that they didn't have Penthouse foisted upon them, but had the newsagent really run out of Playgirl?

But here's the second surprise. On closer – purely professional – inspection of Penthouse, it was noticed it had a videogame on the cover. '*Singles!*' it proclaims. 'We look at the saucy new 'SIMs' game!' Odd typography, but perhaps that's a savvy attempt to keep EA's laywers off the track. The review itself was the kind of banal press-release chatter you read in most non-specialist publications, but the four-page game section made a graphic point. People who like sex like videogames. And that means people who like videogames like sex. So why don't they get to have any?

That's sex in games, of course. And the answer is that nowadays, finally, they can. This month, *Fable* (p94) may not deliver on the bulk of its own hype but at least it's a world where if you like a lady you can try to coax her into bed. The upcoming *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude* (below) may have a smutty sense of humour, but its hero's misadventures bear more resemblence to the real world of sex than the off-the-peg leather vixens you find in other games.

It's part of a crucial trend. The more videogames take on sex on its own terms, and bring it into the game world as an honest reflection of a crucial part of human experience, the harder it becomes to sustain the adolescent smirking to which tradeshow 'booth babes' cater. Apart from anything else, it's a great way to attract more women. Why? Because they like sex, too. Haven't you read Lady Chatterley's Lover?




034


036


039


041


041

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2

The Ghosts return to face a fresh North Korean nuclear threat, with discrete PS2 and Xbox coders in tow. But are two development teams really better than one?



In order to emphasise that you can die at any moment, there's no health meter – anathema for console shooters – although you are given an indication of the overall well-being of your squad



s far as videogames are concerned, it's taken for granted that guns are good. Which makes guns with built-in cameras allowing you to shoot around corners even better. Combine that with airburst grenades and the ability to call in your own personal air strike and you can see why gamers may be tempted to eschew *Ghost Recon 2*'s squad-based manoeuvrings in favour of the new Lone Wolf mode, which sees your character equipped with an arsenal of such prototype soldiers' toys.

But while the Lone Wolf function offers a

The greater emphasis on action means you control a group of four soldiers, as opposed to the teams that featured in the first Recon



Common to both formats is a new over-the-shoulder perspective, although it's also possible to revert to a firstperson view

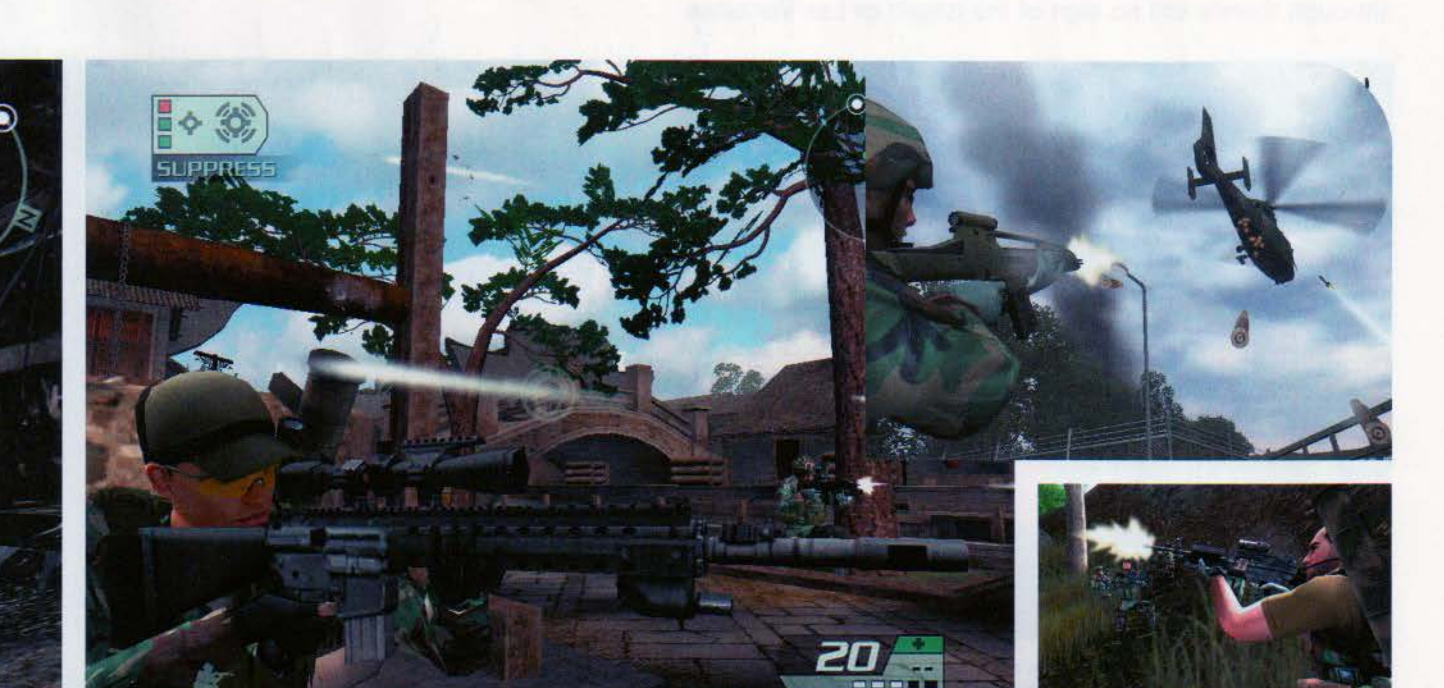
reassuringly gung-ho take on proceedings, it's the team-based Campaign mode that remains at the heart of *Ghost Recon 2*. In contrast to the resolutely bland conceit behind the action (rogue North Korean general diverts humanitarian aid to feed his own army, invades China, threatens to instigate nuclear exchange), Ubisoft has taken a rather more radical approach to the actual development of the game, with the PS2 and Xbox iterations being coded by separate teams. Indeed, they are in effect entirely different games – a ploy primarily designed to avoid the usual Clancy problem of the Sony game being a poor man's incarnation of the Microsoft version. Where they share common characters, weapons and general locations, they will not share any missions. The Xbox version will feature larger play areas and a slower, more considered pace, while PS2 gamers will get a fast game with smaller battlefields.

While players are faced with a familiar array of 15 missions set across the North Korean countryside that place them in charge of a squad of crack operatives, the game's greater emphasis on action now means that both versions see you control a single group of four soldiers, as opposed to the two or three teams that featured in the first *Recon*. The notion is that gamers will always be at the heart of the action, although this is at the expense of the tactical manipulations of the original. Neither are you able to pick your own squad – the team for each mission is pre-selected – which surely results in the loss of another of the game's strategic layers.

But it has other offerings this time round. There's a major focus on the online aspect of both incarnations and the PS2 version – actually a prequel set four years prior to its Xbox stablemate – even has a dedicated team of 30 at Ubisoft's Montreal studio toiling away purely on the game's online multiplayer functions, which will support up to 16 players with voice communication.

An improved ranking system motivates gamers to balance the two competing teams and to include new players: more points are earned for attaining victory with less experienced operatives. 'Me first' gunplay is now also discouraged as members of winnin teams are rewarded with an equal number of points – unlike, say, *Jungle Storm* in which you were remunerated for individual achievements. The PS2 game (which utilises the Unreal engine and Havok physics) also includes an intriguing Colour Of War function that Ubisoft is at pains to herald: as you enter a combat situation, the colour gradually drain

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Ubisoft**
Developer: **In-house (PS2), Red Storm (Xbox)**
Origin: **China, US**
Release: **November 25**









A new context-sensitive command interface allows players to instruct their troops on where to go and how to behave (scout ahead, lay suppressive fire, take out enemies with grenades, etc) with the minimum of fuss

ay from the visuals to bequeath a bleak
ck Hawk Down-style aesthetic.

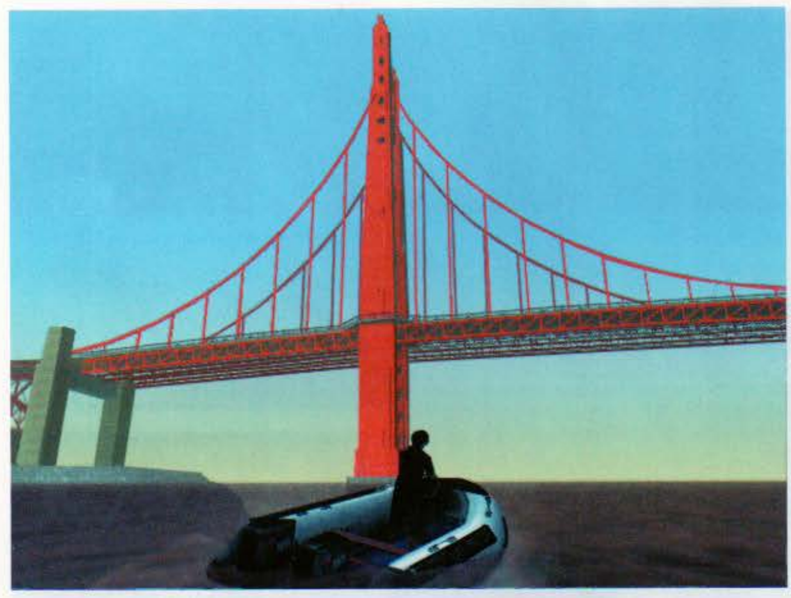
Meanwhile, over on Microsoft's console, 're promised an altogether more realistic d less forgiving war experience (although it nains to be seen how much credibility rests not being able to crawl through sundry ubbery). The proprietary-engine-based title ludes the expected additional singleplayer ctions (Recon, Defend, Firefight) plus a re captivating multiplayer experience nich offers fourplayer splitscreen and -up as well as Xbox Live, allowing for up to ht players across just two machines, for tance). Central to this is the Xbox-exclusive t And Mouse, in which the first of up to 16 yers to gain a kill becomes the Lone Wolf persoldier. The Lone Wolf character is then transformed into the objective and whoever kills him gains the prototype kit. Think Running Man with added air strikes.

At the time of its console release, the first *Ghost Recon* was the most exciting Xbox Live experience available. *GR2* will struggle to achieve that status, but this promises to be a superior online squad-based experience – for both Xbox *and* PS2. Although whether the Clancy hardcore will be disenfranchised by some of the title's concessions to the mainstream remains to be seen.

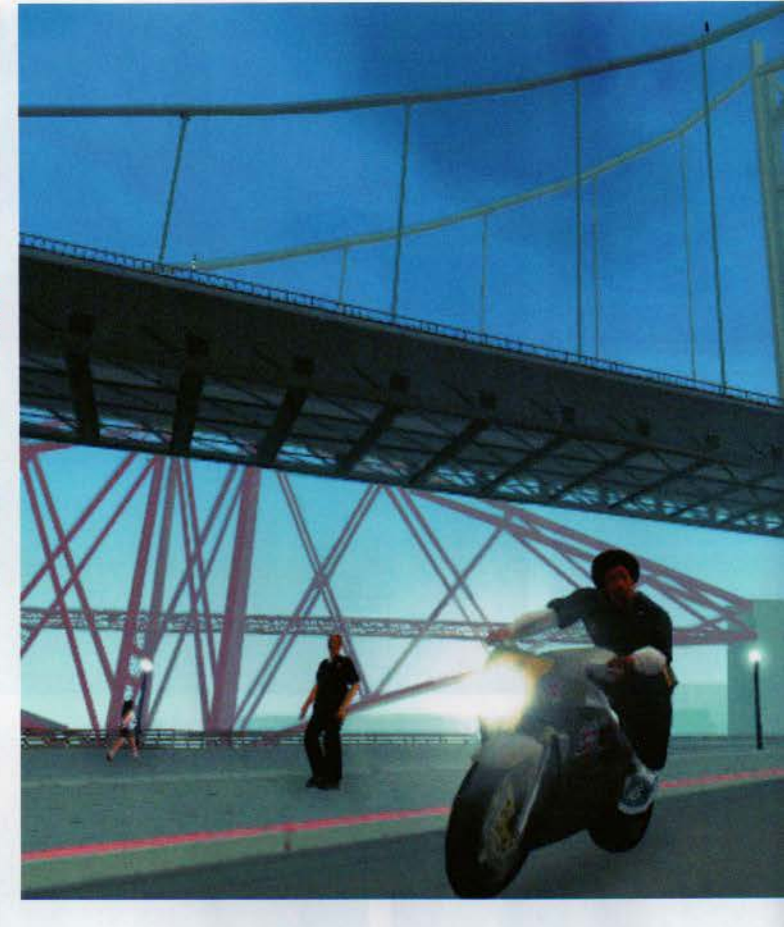
Subsequent to the title's November debut, Red Storm will then go on to code a PC version, while Ubisoft Shanghai will set to work on a GameCube outing. Rogue members of the Korean military have been duly cautioned.

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

Another month, another look at original gangster GTA – although there's still no sign of the desert or Las Venturas



Beneath the water's surface lie dolphins, turtles, schools of fish and more. Lead character CJ can now swim, although getting hold of a boat is a more sensible option when it comes to getting around



Whatever's been promised, no other developer has yet been able to conjure up gameworlds with the nerve and verve of cities Liberty and Vice. We've spent a lot of time in both, which makes the trip to San Andreas one draped with heavy expectation. For those of you yearning to make the journey, you can actually take yourself there now: simply look at the screenshots here and imagine them moving in the manner of *GTA III* or *Vice City*. What you see in your head is what the game looks like. More than anything else, *San Andreas* is a continuation of what's gone before. Yes, there's more detail in what's happening around you. Yes, the map is umpteen times larger than before. And, yes, the gunplay mechanics have been carried over from *Manhunt* and are therefore brilliantly effective. But the game is ploughing a proven furrow.

Simply look at the screenshots here and imagine them moving in the manner of GTAIII. What you see in your head is what it looks like



The night/day cycles are more convincing than before, while rainfall will affect your car's ability to hold on to the city streets

The overall objective is broken down into missions. You undertake those missions on foot and in vehicles – be they bikes, boats, cars, helicopters or whatever. Completing the missions often involves a certain amount of violence. Those who don't appreciate what contemporary videogames represent won't see what's different this time around.

That might take a less naïve eye. When you look properly you can see that the world of San Andreas is a more convincing one than before. Birds flit around as you take in the nuances of a downtown neighbourhood. Passers-by stroll, then break into runs as they go about their business. The tyres of your BMX make a humming sound as they coast over the tarmac. When rough weather rolls into town, a combination of thunder and lightning puts in an audiovisual appearance.

In the sky, as you float across the state in a Dodo, you see that the clouds aren't merely textures painted on sky boxes but textures set on objects hanging there to be flown through. They are physical units. It's hardly flight-sim territory, sure, but it's a fair measure of the sort of attention to detail that's being spent on an audaciously ambitious project. The result is a world flecked with environmental touches that give it more believability. It's still rendered in cartoony hues, but it feels more *alive*.

On the ground, one of the biggest changes here concerns the way in which you can navigate the gameworld. It's now possible to climb around the scenery – indeed, a mission involving a tanker will see you hoisting yourself up on to containers on your way to tracking down a bad guy. Rockstar isn't attempting to turn *GTA* into some kind of *Tomb Raider* (the suggestion provokes laughter), but it's clear that giving the player more flexibility in navigating the gameworld is an issue: we're told that any edge you can touch can be climbed upon – so you'll be able to drive a car up to a piece of game architecture, jump out, and use the vehicle as a kind of stepping stone to reach an otherwise-inaccessible area (although it's doubtful that you'd need to perform such an action unless you were tracking down a particularly well-hidden bonus item).

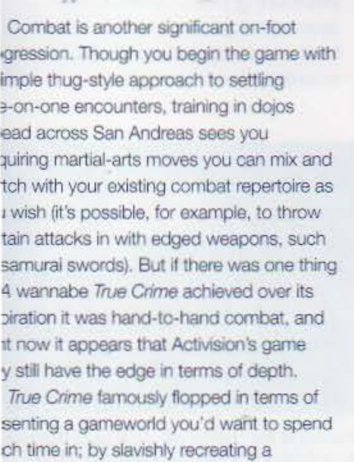
Format: **PS2, PC**
Publisher: **Rockstar**
Developer: **In-house (Rockstar North)**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **October 29 (PS2), 2005 (PC)**

Previously in **E**138, **E**140, **E**141









Combat is another significant on-foot gression. Though you begin the game with imple thug-style approach to settling e-on-one encounters, training in dojos ead across San Andreas sees you quiring martial-arts moves you can mix and tch with your existing combat repertoire as u wish (it's possible, for example, to throw tain attacks in with edged weapons, such samurai swords). But if there was one thing 4 wannabe *True Crime* achieved over its piration it was hand-to-hand combat, and it now it appears that Activision's game y still have the edge in terms of depth.

True Crime famously flopped in terms of senting a gameworld you'd want to spend ch time in; by slavishly recreating a l-world environment it missed the point of why fictional places can be so thoroughly entertaining. San Andreas is a much more attractive location, not only because it encompasses city, suburban and out-of-town areas but because of what happens within those broad confines. We were surprised, for example, while on our way to a mission set in one of the 12 townships dotted over the countryside, to see a police unit pull across in front of a reckless tractor driver up ahead and make an arrest. And, quite obviously, the surprises don't end there.

There are stealth kills, for example, delivered by a knife to the neck following a sneaky creep up towards an enemy.

But Rockstar doesn't want to give it all away just now, promising that we've still only scratched the game's surface…





You can spend your cash on upgrading your favoured vehicle, giving it new wheels, paint jobs and spoilers (left), although the effect is only aesthetic. And don't forget to save some cash to sort out your hairdo at the barbershop

Sid Meier's Pirates

Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Atari**
Developer: **Firaxis**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4 2004**

Previously in **E138**

In which Firaxis plunders the Caribbean and grabs itself some fine 17-year-old booty



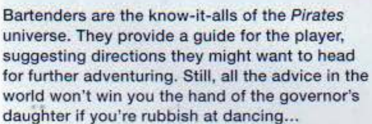
"It troubles me a little bit," says Firaxis CEO **Jeff Briggs**, considering the future of videogames. "I think there's a move towards a more linear theory of game design. Talk to any publisher and the first thing they want to know is: 'What's the story?' And with us it's like: 'Whatever the player wants'."

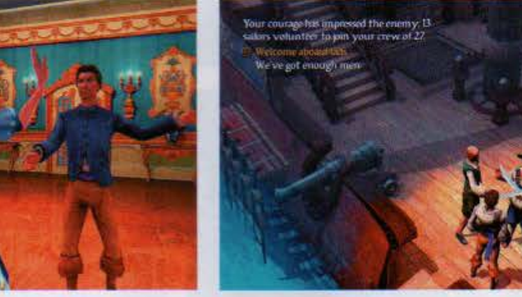
Pirates, the return of a game idea premiered by Briggs and Sid Meier back in 1987, is about as non-linear as you'd expect from the team that gave the world *Civilisation*. "There's no scripted story at all. There's one overriding arc, that your family has been kidnapped by pirates, and one way of doing well is to rescue them all – your mother and father, sister, uncle, brothers. *Every* pirate had a family scattered across the Caribbean," quips Briggs. "But that's just one way.

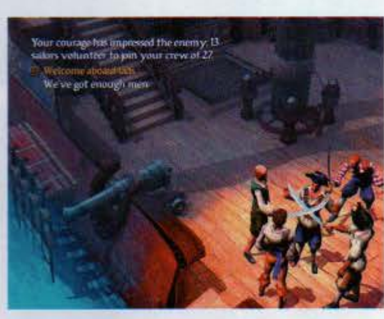
"So, you could do well by getting rich through plunder, you could do well by being a privateer for one of the nations and getting promoted through the ranks to an admiral. There's this whole buried treasure thing – there are ten historical pirates in the game, like Blackbeard, or Henry Morgan, and strangely enough they've all buried treasure somewhere in the Caribbean. You can buy pieces of maps at taverns, but when you find the treasure, it pisses them off, and they start coming after you. Then there's the fame race, to become the most fearsome pirate. Or you could try and marry the top governor's daughter." Or have a girl in every port, perhaps? And indeed you can.

A word on the wooing – it's a rhythm-action section where you have to follow the dance steps indicated by the object of your affection. *Pirates* could be regarded as a collection of minigames bonded together by the (self-written) story arc, a diverse, pacey adventure, whose genre is as much dictated by the player as it is by the developer. A jack of all trades, and a master of…? "One of the problems we have is that there are so many games now that focus on one of those genres exclusively, like fighting games, swordfighting games, and they do it very well, devote full $10m budgets to doing just do that," explains Briggs. "In our game that's only one of the action elements, and there are eight, so the game is more about the overarching life of the pirate. So each of the sequences has to be fun to do over and over, but we have to be quick, zippy, [to] get the player to make a few decisions and then move on."

So, there's the swordfighting element for melee combat; the top-down battling for sailing ships; the resource management for pre-sail preparation; the stealth component for sneaking into towns – and so on. It's true to the spirit of the original as it is to the philosophy of Firaxis – iterative game development to the benefit of all. It believes freedom is the future, and it's not afraid to revisit the past to prove it.





Bartenders are the know-it-alls of the *Pirates* universe. They provide a guide for the player, suggesting directions they might want to head for further adventuring. Still, all the advice in the world won't win you the hand of the governor's daughter if you're rubbish at dancing…





Pressure cookin'

Briggs on the pressure of developing a follow-up to such a highly regarded title: "It is a lot of pressure. I'm keeping my fingers crossed; I hope that we deliver. I think that we are. One thing we've tried to keep in mind is that the guys who played the original games are 17 years older. Many of them have kids of their own, and we want the game to be appealing to those kids, too. It's one of the most easy games to pick up and play I've ever seen."



Players of the original will recall swordfighting. *Soul Calibur* it is not, but competent blade wielders can string together pleasing sequences

Sly 2: Band Of Thieves

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEE**
Developer: **Sucker Punch**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Out now (US), Q4 (UK)**

Previously in **E**136, **E**138

ucker Punch's circus of crime finally makes its encore erformance – thankfully without an 'extreme' makeover

Sly Cooper's first outing was criticised and cherished for much the same reason: that its thiefly overtones re window dressing (luscious, watercolour-d-ink dressing, at that) for a straightforward tformer. Sucker Punch's decision to rework lopsided balance between sneaker and uble-jumper for the sequel may have crificed some of its old-school purity, but it es Sly's gang finally finding their stride.

With each episode's tasks given context part of a heist, instead of the increasingly attershot selection of levels and minigames ts predecessor, *Band Of Thieves* is a far re assured experience. And Sly is a far re assured thief: while coins can still be ned by smashing scenery – more vandalus coonus than thievius, it seems – it's now ssible to take a lightfingered approach, king pockets or spiriting valuables back to safehouse. Even the potential pitfall of an reased reliance on stealth is smoothly lted with clever aural and visual cues.

If the production design of Sly's lush, light world is faultless, though, the same nnot be said of the way you're led through y the hand. The early moments are sessed, almost to the point of self-parody, h ensuring no action goes unprompted. upled with forced restarts when an ective is failed (making the removal of the ginal title's sudden deaths largely irrelevant), a conspiracy of lecture and repetition that uld bully the pleasure out of play.

And that would be horrendously unfair h a game this openly pleasurable. Simply ving Sly through the environments is a owcase of animation, gleefully exaggerated ysics and supple control; his accomplices intentionally blundering, the fall guys to the ding raccoon, but just as characterful. ough it occasionally seems all three aracters have cameo roles in their own vie, with some tasks too brief to revel in the meplay, this lends a punchy sense of pace he overall episode – if one that's deflated the frequent pauses for instruction.

On balance, the overzealous coaching is s disruptive than the grinding framerate ps of the first *Sly* (which are now magically sent), but it's a wrong-footed start to a me where level and mechanic design are art enough to be their own explanation. *nd Of Thieves* looks to be quite capably e of the best cartoons you could hope to y: the issue is whether the later game can ow the same confidence in the player is evident in the production.









Broadly, the structure of *Band Of Thieves*' episodes hasn't changed from the original: each consists of a hub connecting various sub-missions. Exploring their networks of highwires and rooftops provide some of the game's most liberating, thrilling moments

Ratchet & Clank 3: Up Your Arsenal

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Insomniac Games
Origin: US
Release: November

Previously in E138

Insomniac Games sticks to its guns (and *that* subtitle) for an even more intense ballistic ballet



Insomniac Games must have one of the worst of the best jobs around. Its *Ratchet & Clank* series is with headshot accuracy zeroed in on gameplay via gunplay. With such focus it must be so, so easy to see how to make your game better, but so, so hard to see how to make it different without invoking change for its own sake.

Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal is, like *R&C2*, well summed up by describing it as just the previous game but with phasers set to something far more deadly than just 'stun'. Within the opening level – a stage filled with chunky and familiar *R&C* scenery – things take an instant turn for the intense, with Ratchet pitched into a fray between invading aliens and the planet's defence force. It's a far less asinine beginning than the typically dull opening hour of either of the previous games.

And so it's straight into battle, and into some weapons. Such as the excellent plasma whip, a firecracker of a melee weapon that snaps and lashes around the player in a deadly spiral. Or the Infector, a goo-gobbing gun whose slimy payload turns enemies against one another, adding as much to the chaos as your odds of survival.



We've not had chance to play *Up Your Arsenal* online, but the promise is there for a frantic and bombastic team deathmatch experience

Each weapon is upgradeable several times over, and your nanotech (health bar) seems to upgrade every few minutes, instead of every few levels. This time, it seems, there are enough upgrades to put *Need For Speed Underground* to shame. And it's clear that this is going to be the most busy and challenging *R&C* yet, with the player swiftly encountering the kind of resistance that didn't appear until the latter stages of the previous games.

While the bulk of play is concerned with the traditional template of loud, flexible and brutal gunplay interspersed with gently funnelled, functional puzzling, there are the expected new details and slants. Within the first level, for example, is a mini-skydiving scene, the player weaving between a wave of missiles. Later, playing as bumbling loser Captain Quark, you'll have the chance to take on some classy 2D platforming.

This third outing is looking to prove one thing – that *R&C* is one of the few game series that sits comfortably with both ludicrous subtitles and the bigger/faster/louder culture of sequels.







Refinements include temporary invincibility and bolt-collecting multipliers. Also, you can now restock all your ammo in one simple purchase







Project: Snowblind

Format: **PC, PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Crystal Dynamics**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4**

Previously in **E**138

eus Ex was supposed to be the FPS that brought the sophistication and ubtlety of an RPG to the genre. But what if you just like shooting things?

W hatever *Deus Ex: Invisible War*'s strengths, it had its share of disappointments. One strength was e weapon modification system; one of the appointments was its gunplay. It's no nder, then, that an FPS based on Denton's verse is one which has provoked as much thusiasm as hesitation. Early signs, wever, are that Crystal Dynamics has eserved the flexibility and sensitivity of *isible War*'s upgrades while evolving the nplay into chunkily satisfying firefights.

Although fire, in this instance, is perhaps e last thing you'll be fighting with. One of *owblind*'s major hooks is the imaginative nge of weaponry you'll have access to. As ll as pistols and grenades, there are nasty w inventions such as a gun which shoots a ower of sentient flesh-eaters. Let rip a und and you can duck back under cover, tching with fascinated horror as they flock m one unfortunately enemy to the next, ggering shrieking panic as they go. Crystal namics also promises a physics-based eapon – a kind of magnetic grenade which ce deployed will either repulse all metal in e area, forcing it outward in a wave of provised shrapnel, or pull it inward, enching guns out of enemies' hands.

As well as this arsenal of creative truction, *Snowblind* will give you access to *isible War*'s biomod system, allowing your aracter to develop superhuman skills lping him sneak or stomp his way through tory. Overall, the combination of the two stems looks like a promising way to marry *us Ex*'s RPG heritage into the solid, ectacular gunplay a pure FPS requires.

That solidity extends to the environments, ich are detailed and dense. The game's ng Kong setting has given artists free reign let loose with flaring neon and thundering onsoons and the skill with which they've en created bodes well for the later, more en sections of the game. You share these vironments with your squad mates, who – ough autonomous – you'll be required to ide, protect and heal. At this stage there's clear sense of how well this will work, pecially as games rarely make squad haviour anything other than infuriating.

While there may be anxieties over AI d squad behaviour, the game's online pabilities will sidestep any of these estions. Few details have been confirmed , but the typical range of FPS battle modes l be available, with up to 16 players pported on Xbox and PS2.















All guns have a secondary fire function, such as a sniper scope, and you also have access to grenades. Flicking between weapons is easy and intuitive, which encourages experimentation

Waga Ryuwo Miyo: Pride Of The Dragon Peace

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEI**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **October 28 (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Dragon-fanciers of the world unite: after endless titles where the only well-behaved dragon is a dead dragon, Sony suggests positive reinforcement













In a more traditional arrangement than the cooperative play, a versus mode allows a second player to import a dragon for a coliseum battle. Oddly, it's also possible to irreversibly combine two dragons from separate memory cards into one superbeast



That's 'Look At My Dragon', an indication that, of all the aspects of *Panzer Dragoon* Sony's new action-RPG recalls, the bleak atmosphere isn't one of them. The prospects for *Dragon Peace*'s world aren't much rosier, though, as an uprising of spirits threatens it with destruction unless a pilgrimage is made to the heart of a monolithic tower. As a Dragon Peace operative, this task falls to you and a partner – either AI-controlled or, interestingly, in twoplayer cooperative mode with another player's imported character and dragon.

Dragonback exploration is a free-roaming thirdperson affair, with enemies visible in the field. To engage a spirit in combat, it must be drawn into the real world, accomplished by trapping it (and the players) within a shielded bubble. Once enveloped in this arena, your dragon can be instructed to fight using close combat attacks, magic and counters, in addition to working in concert with your teammate's mount. It can also be encouraged to learn combat techniques by praising useful actions and scolding it for less desirable ones: judicious application of tough love can equip a dragon with up to ten techniques, which can then be performed on command.

Dragons naturally grow in size and power as they gain experience, and can be fed spirits that have been overcome in battle – adding digestion to defeat – to boost their attributes. A fully mature dragon's development will cease, however, and at this point hard-hearted players may choose to reincarnate their old faithful, transferring most of its previous skills into a new, infant dragon for further stat-crunching.

Increasing a dragon's strength without venturing into the wild is possible at the local coliseum, which hosts weekly friendly duels. Victories also improve the player's ranking within the Dragon Peace, with higher ranks offering more complex missions, a wider selection of equipment, and a better salary. The Peace is publicly funded, dependent on how satisfied the populace is with the organisation's performance: this money is then split by rank among all the dragon riders, doubtless leading to several grudge matches' worth of institutional resentment.

But the greatest threat may simply be a lack of willing heroes: with Sony's internally incubated RPGs running the gamut of quality from the lamentable *Legend Of Dragoon* to the sincere-but-flawed *Wild Arms Advanced 3rd*, it's difficult to predict the audience for a 'dragon psychology action' title.

Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Rockstar**
Developer: **In-house (Rockstar San Diego)**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4**

Previously in **E**138

The studio once responsible for the Midtown Madness games is back for a third stab at the Midnight franchise

Wyclef Jean owns a truck. It is a custom model featuring an on-board fish tank. In the tank swim baby sharks. Welcome to the world of extreme automotive makeovers, the backbone of Rockstar's third *Club* title.

There's nothing quite as outrageous as the ex-Fugees man's ride in the game; rather you're faced with a variety of spoilers, exhausts, bonnet vents, underlighting, etc, that add simple performance upgrades and obvious aesthetic overhauls. Everything is licensed from real-world manufacturers and incorporated under advisement from the staff of DUB magazine, the American publication dedicated to modding luxury autos.

Once you've tinkered and refined your vehicle it's into the game proper, spread over three cities – Detroit, Atlanta and San Diego. Driving challenges commonly involve A-to-B races but also incorporate outrunning police and drag races at beach locations.

It is immediately obvious that you're dealing with graphics technology that is new to the series: Rockstar San Diego's engine uses five times the texture memory of the previous game, and the result is a racing environment that belches atmosphere. The vehicles themselves are so shiny it's almost dazzling and, with the faster cars, background detail whips past in a riot of busy colour. In fact, your performance in the first few races may well be negatively affected by all the detail being flung at you, because shrugging off aggressive CPU opponents while looking for boost opportunities and simultaneously keeping an eye on the map *and* monitoring the road ahead is already a juggling act that requires considerable concentration. Getting to know these cities intimately will therefore be a high priority.

At least the various motorcycles – from hogs to sports machines – are easier to handle this time around, their twitchiness having been noticeably reduced. Gunning one of the quicker examples down a packed street, on to a ramp and over a moving train is an explosively entertaining rush.

Clearly, the driving game market has reached something like saturation point, and *Club 3*'s Big New Thing – its suite of customisation options – has already been seen in the likes of *Need For Speed: Underground* and, more recently, *Juiced*. The real difference with Rockstar's game is that the vehicles on offer aren't likely to fall within gamers' real-world budgets. Its line-up of truly exotic hardware will set it apart.



It'll be possible to store up to 20 vehicles in your garage, including bikes, classics, sports saloons and Hummers (above). New sets of wheels can be acquired with cash or by winning races



Each of the vehicles is now licensed, as are the individual parts. Detail extends right down to rims: the spokes on each wheel are no longer represented by flat textures but by full 3D models



Midnight multiplayer

The previous instalment of *Midnight Club* was one of the first PS2 titles to offer online gaming functionality, and support for connectivity is being pursued with the sequel. Rockstar is offering eightplayer online races, an interface to support detailed stats for players, and the ability to join races in progress. Moreover, the game will allow host migration, ensuring that races can be finished if the original host drops out.

Kessen 3

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Koei
Developer: In-house
Origin: Japan
Release: Q4 2004 (Japan), 2005 (UK)

Koei's feudal army simulator evolves from studious wargame to dignified button-masher





As with previous titles, FMV sequences relay the politics of the day between massacres. Koei boasts *Kessen 3* will feature 130 minutes' worth

The original *Kessen* was one of few PS2 launch titles to achieve success outside of software famine-induced desperation, thanks to a savvy marriage of tabletop strategy and crowd-pleasing, crowd-pushing 3D grandeur (if a grandeur now thoroughly eclipsed by *Rome*'s legions). While its direct sequel dramatically upped the number of units populating the battle sequences, *Kessen 3* sees Koei giving its fans what they want: and what they want is apparently more *Dynasty Warriors*.

That's perhaps not entirely fair, as though the new game features direct control of your army from the vantage point of a horse-mounted general, it maintains a healthy strategy bias. Simple charge and attack commands can be combined into powerful combo assaults, tactical formations assembled with allied armies and battlefield conditions – weather, season, light level and terrain – turned to a canny commander's advantage. On a less historically credible note, various forms of offensive, defensive and ninjitsu magic can be called upon to support or harry combatants.

Successful campaigns earn your general points to spend on equipment, mounts or new attack techniques, while completists can occupy themselves by scouring the battlefields for some 450 special items.



Thirty classes of soldier feature, covering every specialisation from archer to swordsman to mounted lancer. For ease of management in the fray, each formation consists of only one class

Crash 'n' Burn

Format: PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Climax
Origin: UK
Release: October 29

Climax gears up to deliver a spine-jangling racer whose smash-happy action makes for some shattering spills

Maybe it's just the preview code jitters, but *Crash 'n' Burn*'s looks are, to begin with, worryingly basic. It's only when things start moving, and cars starts to prise each other apart, that the functional environments and vehicle models begin to make sense.

With a guaranteed 16 cars on the track (even during online sessions with just two players), it's obvious that *Crash 'n' Burn*'s preoccupation is with petrol-fuelled automotive suicide above all else. Ramps and mischievous banks are sprinkled around the tracks in the most deliberately inconvenient places, encouraging vehicles to noisily dismantle one another at speed. And that initially primitive vibe seems to be the facilitator for plenty of destructive detail – ruined cars leave slicks of oil that can be ignited by a spark, adding walls of flame to the list of obstacles to be avoided.

One of the more maniacal race modes is the excellent Kamikaze, which sees eight cars racing around the track in one direction, with the remaining eight going in the other, in what must be one of the least-insurable events in the modern racing arena. So, despite maybe not sporting the gleaming chassis of *Burnout 3* or the glossily smeared paint job of *Need For Speed Underground*, *Crash 'n' Burn* seems to be expertly geared for throwaway destruction.



The bland vehicles seem skeletal next to those of modern arcade racers like *Burnout 3*, but that anatomical description seems apt considering the fractures and amputations the vehicles suffer





Control is suitably loose and instant for a game where the preferred driving line is whichever one stops you from exploding or falling to pieces

Dragonshard

Format: PC
Publisher: Atari
Developer: Liquid Entertainment
Origin: US
Release: 2005

Wouldn't it be interesting to combine the best bits of an RTS and an RPG? Liquid dreams...





Eberron, the newest D&D world and setting for the game, consists of an autumnal surface and a treacherous, crumbling sunken city beneath

Every six months the PC graphics cards business performs another internal leapfrog, as one manufacturer releases another stat-busting piece of hardware that promises to bring gaming closer to reality than it's ever been. But perhaps the really important PC watermark isn't how close we're getting to reproducing real life, but how accurately PC gaming can model the Citadel miniature. The recreations are pretty flawless nowadays, it turns out, which is why the computer version of tabletop wargaming is having to look to less-superficial areas to innovate, and why Liquid's latest foray into D&D seeks to innovate somewhat more than its last effort, the functional *The Lord Of The Rings: War Of The Ring*.

So, *Dragonshard* splits itself in two. The above-the-ground combat draws on Liquid founder Ed de Castillo's RTS experience, and offers medium-sized army battles where group tactics will outweigh individual majesty. Below the ground, dungeons hide beautifully animated boss monsters, and there the core members of the player's party will come into their own. Only heroes – who provide bonuses above ground, their ethnic traits lending special abilities to their pack – can venture below, bringing a personal aspect to a genre that often lacks the individual touch.



Don't expect generically generated dungeons here. Liquid's D&D world may seem generic to those who can't tell their orcs from their elves, but the US developer promises the sort of attention to detail guaranteed to moisten the palates of Wizards Of The Coast fans

Act Of War

Format: PC
Publisher: Atari
Developer: Eugen Systems
Origin: Sweden
Release: Q2 2005

There's something evil in Washington DC, says Eugen. But then people have claimed that before



Despite *Act Of War* having a storyline scripted by NYT best-selling author (and 'military expert') Dale Brown, it's quite difficult for us to reveal exactly how the terrorists-take-Washington storyline unfolds. Not because the Swedish developer is trying to keep that a secret, but because they seem far more interested in showing off how much havoc their units can wreak on the painstakingly recreated city. "And if I put these guys here…" says one of the designers, dropping some tanks into an already seriously militarised zone, and watching as the tactical combat engine reduces yet another building to rubble. Good, clean fun, of course.

What we do know is this: *Act Of War* is a story-led squad-based RTS set in a near-future where players have to balance financial demands against military needs. The most interesting aspect to strategists will be the lack of a strict weapon hierarchy. Like a very expensive game of scissors-paper-stone, players will have to select the right unit to take down a particular foe, rather than just relying on ploughing money into the most expensive tanks available. On the other hand, the most interesting aspect to others may well be the chance to blow the White House to bits if Eugen can put out a one-level demo in time for the presidential elections.



Arresting enemies rather than killing them will earn you money which you can spend on better ways of killing enemies. On the flipside, want to evac wounded comrades? It's going to cost you. Ah, the bitter cost of conflict morality





It's not yet clear how near to the knuckle *Act Of War* will be prepared to take its collateral damage and pre-emptive strikes

Kururin Squash

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Eighting**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **October 14 (Japan)**

One of Game Boy Advance's most notorious cult favourites carefully guides itself on to the TV screen



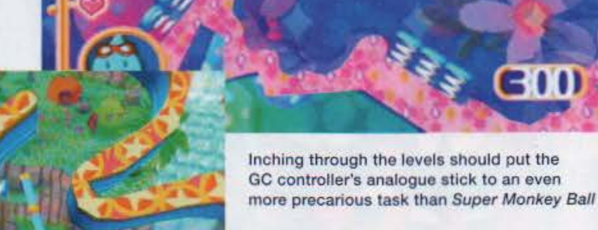


The boxing stick can be used to batter away a boss's defences (top) while the flaming stick appears to feature in on-rail sections (above)

Not for the faint of heart, *Kuru Kuru Kururin* was a GBA launch title in the true sense of the term: the trials of steering its rotating stick through increasingly unforgiving circuits would tempt many to launch their handheld through the nearest window.

After 2002's Japan-only GBA reprise, *Kururin Paradise*, Eighting has finally brought the maddening franchise to new hardware and new masochists with *Squash*. While the 3D graphical makeover is the most obvious improvement (though the art retains the aggressively cheery pastel tones of the GBA versions), *Squash* also boasts different models of stick, each with associated special actions, such as burning flames or springing boxing gloves, to aid in clearing obstacles and overcoming the stage-end bosses. Coins strewn through each course, no doubt placed to upset the risk-reward balance ever further toward risk, can be used to purchase these specialised sticks from shops.

Splitscreen multiplayer appears to support at least races and deathmatch, but details on further modes, connectivity, or how the extra hardware power and the third dimension will affect the traditionally inventive level design are scarce. The low ¥3,980 (£20) price point, though, should make it an enticing holdover for series fans until the likely prospect of a DS title.



Inching through the levels should put the GC controller's analogue stick to an even more precarious task than *Super Monkey Ball*

Mushihimesama

Format: **Arcade**
Publisher: **AMI**
Developer: **Cave**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **November**

Bullet hell for you and the golden beetle you rode in on: Cave's latest takes the battle to the insect kingdom



Extending the 2D shooter's supposed swansong for another year, Cave's latest title displays a shift from the developer's trademark structure back to more familiar genre traditions. As with *Espgaluda* (see **E**139), it's a considered attempt to temper hardcore intricacy with the wider appeal shooters once enjoyed.

Mushihimesama's first surprise is the option of two pace-setting difficulty modes from the outset: Normal features rapid but sparse enemy fire, while Maniac offers a typical Cave wall of bullets, but at a slower shot speed. The second, more major departure is the abandonment of player character-specific fire patterns, with the titular Insect Princess able to switch between the three firing modes (Straight, Wide or Mighty) by collecting power-ups during play. Satellite weapon pickups also make their Cave shooter debut, with up to four laser-gouting options available in the wild: these can be assigned to either follow or flank the player.

Apparently still to be finalised as of *Mushihimesama*'s test showing is its scoring system: the method to the bullet madness. Given the experimental nature of the game's other mechanics, an entirely new system or a more straightforward chain-combo dynamic are equally possible.











Even by the firm's own neon standards, the luminous art design is possibly Cave's most audaciously vivid to date

Prescreen Alphas

This month's announcements and updates

Area 51

Format: PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Midway
Developer: In-house





Midway's dark-horse shooter gains a deliciously appropriate voice cast: David Duchovny as the protagonist, Powers Boothe as a gruff major and Marilyn Manson as Edgar, the Grey alien

Zoids Struggle

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Tomy
Developer: Eighting



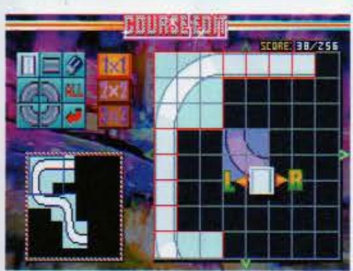


To date, the mechanised dinosaurs have been a franchise without a worthy console title – but this offering from ex-shooter developer Eighting, detouring from *Kururin*, could be the exception

F-Zero Climax

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house





Though *Climax* features two new special attacks and a gruelling Survival Mode, it's the Course Edit that appeals most. A password data system allows finished courses to be saved and traded

SingStar Party

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: In-house





Multiplayer modes are the focus of this *SingStar* expansion, including a duet mode that can be inflicted on 30 new tracks or the original's lineup. More importantly: 'I Think We're Alone Now'

Grand Theft Auto (working title)

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Rockstar
Developer: Digital Eclipse/Rockstar





A curious visual collision between *GTA*'s original gangster style and post-*GTAIII* cues, the all-conquering franchise goes handheld with a new storyline and a 'sprawling' top-down Liberty City

Super Monkey Ball Deluxe

Format: PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-house





With all the levels from the first two games, nearly 50 new tortuous trails and all the minigames, there's no excuse for PS2 and Xbox owners not to get to grips with Expert Level 7

Killzone

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Guerilla





The gloomy, bombed-out beauty of the game remains, but closer inspection has revealed some worrying structural damage in the rigid repetition of event scripting and the kerbs you can't climb

The Saga Of Ryzom

Format: PC
Publisher: Nevrax
Developer: In-house





Nevrax's MMO – hopefully fully operational by the time you read this – has been picked up for UK distribution by Ubisoft, which seems to be collecting a set along with *FFXI* and *EverQuest2*



Beauty of the beast

It has been the stuff of rumour for years, but now its creators are ready to talk. Enter the sequel to Ico

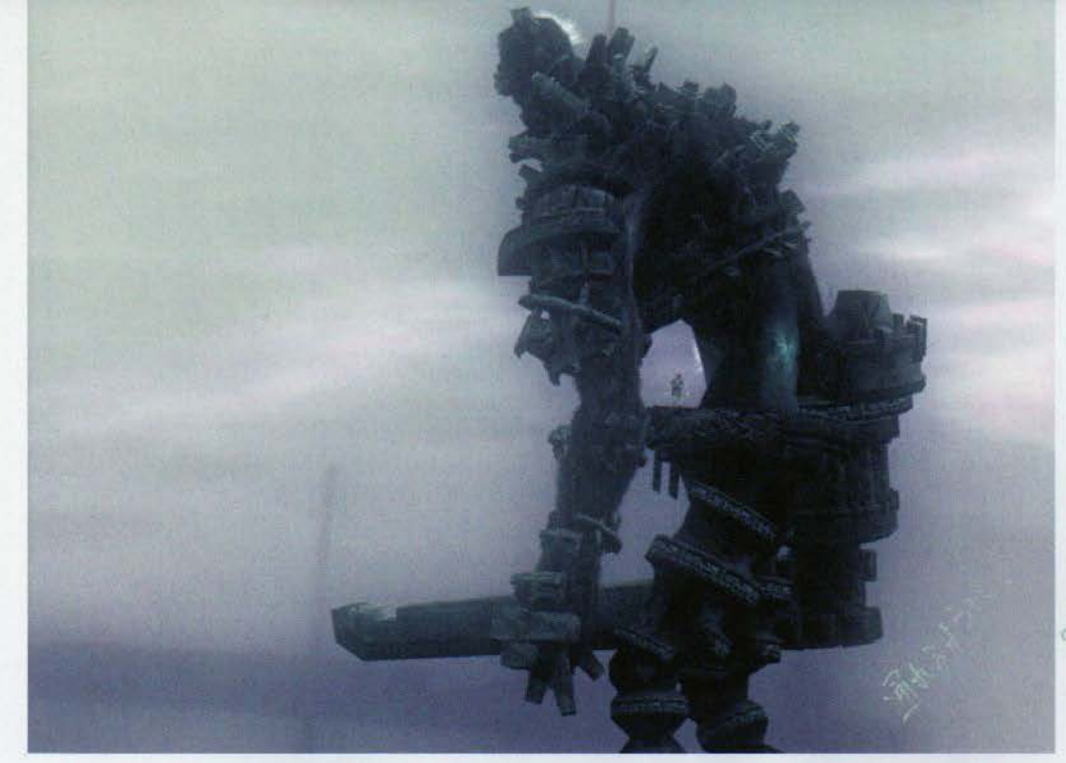
The fairytale version reads like this: in late 2001, SCEI's *Ico* was published in Japan with little fanfare and even less expectation. A few days later the first western importers, whose buying habits are not dictated by taste, but by fervent desperation to Be There First, slipped the disc carefully out of its fetishistic Japanese packaging and into their pristine PS2s. Ten hours later they picked their jaws off the floor. To their surprise and delight, this time they'd hit the jackpot: they were there first for something really important. They were the first to experience the Emotion Engine as it was promised, the first to experience a pivotal moment in videogaming's evolution.

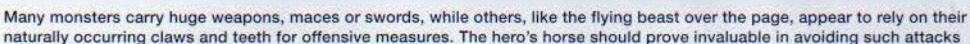
From here, everything would be different, because everyone, *everyone*, would know *Ico,* and it would surely shape gaming's future.

Why? Not because of what *Ico* was – a delicately weighted hybrid of puzzle game and platformer that set out to do something quite simple and did it with elegance. Nor because of how *Ico*'s faultless world was constructed – minimalist, delicately ethereal, but with so much solidity in its stone-sculpted castle walls that it didn't seem like level design, but *architecture*. Nor was it really down to the premise – 'escape the castle and save the girl' had kept videogaming in stock storylines forever, though never had it been more tactfully executed than here. *Ico*'s magic wasn't quantifiable, and still isn't. Call it maturity, or call it a soul. Reviewers knew they loved it, but couldn't tell people why. Eight out of ten be damned: *Ico* is still revolutionary, not in terms of easily expressed stripped-down mechanics, but in the way it makes players feel. It should have sold millions. The end.

Of course, there was no fairytale.

Ico didn't sell millions. Despite being all of those things and more, despite the soul, it didn't get the one thing that really counts: commercial success. Everyone who bought it loved it, but so few people bought it in the first place. How could the game herald the dawn of a brave new world of emotion-led gaming – emotion that wasn't fear or hate or terror – if no one saw it? Does being the first even matter if no one knows? As minimal stocks became bargain-bin fodder, the importers moved on to finding new





Many monsters carry huge weapons, maces or swords, while others, like the flying beast over the page, appear to rely on their naturally occurring claws and teeth for offensive measures. The hero's horse should prove invaluable in avoiding such attacks

firsts, and the oh-my-bleeding-heart critics wept for the death of originality, then returned to evangelising guns and ammo. Plus ça change…

Things stay the same

If the *Ico* team wasn't to change gaming, perhaps gaming would change the *Ico* team. **Fumito Ueda**, producer of the first game, knew that things had to be different on his new project. "With *Ico*, it was one of our intentions to make it a critical success," he explains. "On the other hand, the balance might have been too much toward the critical side, including our marketing activity, so that is one of the points we had to review. We wanted to make the new project with more popular appeal." Besides, it'd be difficult to create the same cultural shockwaves with a linear follow-up: "For *Ico*-like game design, I think that *Ico* is the culmination. And frankly, although I think that it is possible to exceed the quality level of *Ico* with the same sort of content, I figured we can't make a bigger impact than *Ico* did."

As such, *Ico 2* – as we'll call it here even though it's only a working title, the game also being known as *Nico* and *Wanda And Colossus* at various points in its development – isn't a straight sequel. Thematically, though, it's instantly recognisable. If you consider *Ico* a classic fairytale brushed in a palette of washed-out greys and greens, you'll be immediately at home in the stonewashed fields of *Ico 2*. "The game design itself has changed a lot, but visually it is similar because we're using the same designer," confirms Ueda. So far, so pretty.

But Ueda's proclamations that the game design has changed aren't lightweight. For a start, *Ico 2*'s (new, as yet unnamed) hero has no Yorda-style companion. "It's no exaggeration to say that Yorda is the main character of the game *Ico*," muses Ueda on one of videogaming's new icons.

"As a game designer, I have always thought that way. Giving life to Yorda, giving her appeal and presence, was the key to *Ico*'s design success. To protect a non-playable character, like Yorda, and lead her along the way, that was something that was completed in the game

If you consider Ico a classic fairytale in a palette of washed-out greys and greens, you'll be immediately at home in the fields of Ico 2

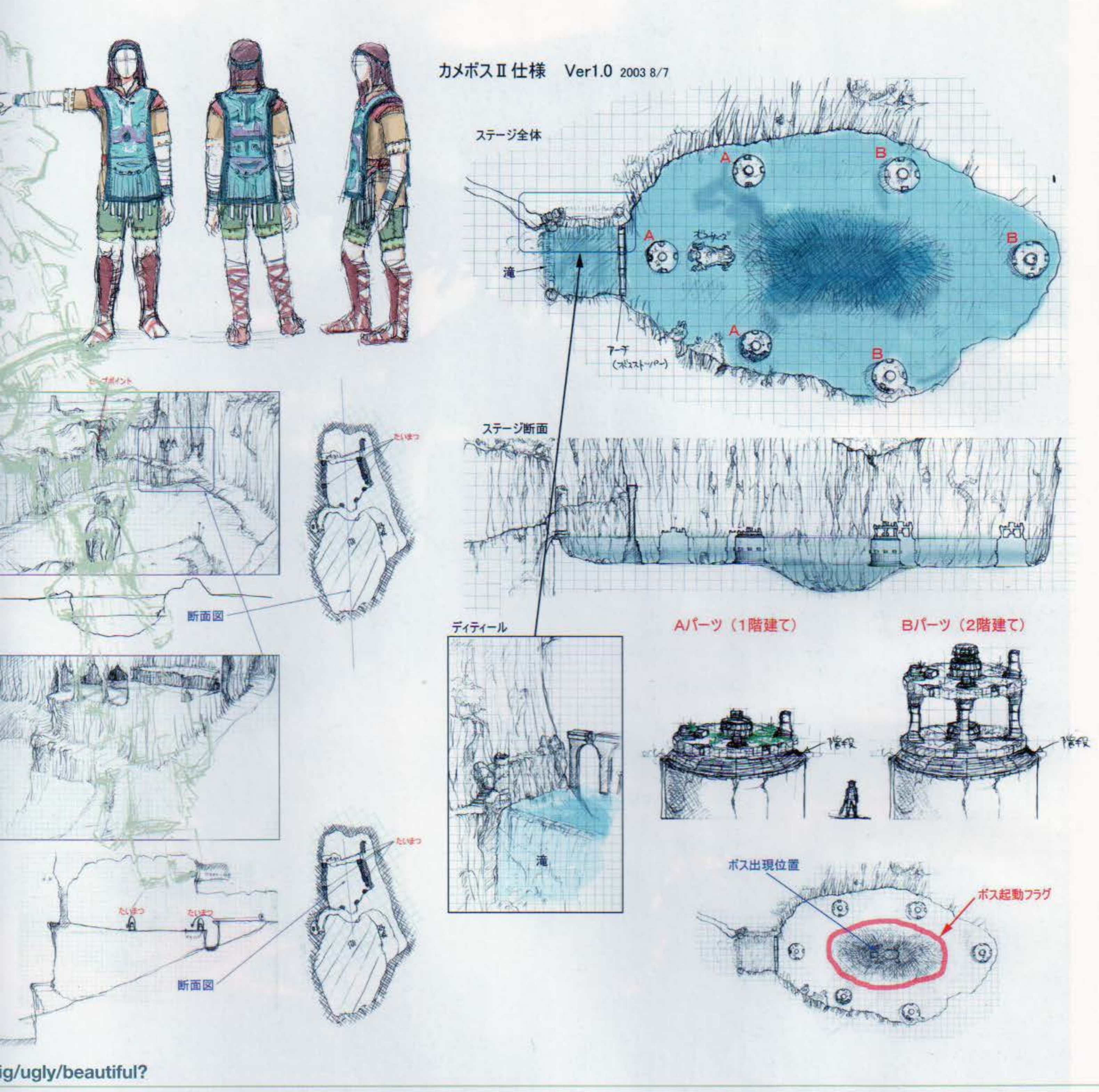






Udea: "This game is for those with quick reactions. However, there are lots of puzzle elements as you have to match wits against monsters' AI, and some monsters' bodies themselves are some sort of puzzles. Overall, there are more action skills required compared to *Ico*"

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Sony Computer Entertainment**
Developer: **In-house (SCEI)**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **2005**



ig/ugly/beautiful?

2's world is as distinctive as that of its predecessor. Ueda plains how he and his team set about making something so bleak so attractive, and the subtle complexities involved in animating 2's huge creatures: "It depends on the situation, but basically I start with the 3D software. The reason for this is because if I rt sketching on paper you can see the friction of the pencil and texture of the paper, and each of these things increases the nsity of the picture, and the final artwork is one with that in it.

"However, if I try to reproduce that on screen, I lose all those precise things, and the density of the artwork becomes disappointingly low. Therefore, to create a 3D model, I use 3D software to produce the density, which I believe is the most efficient way to produce it without messing up. To me, 3D software is what a typewriter is to a novelist. It is the same reason that novelists use typewriters to write their novel from the beginning without first writing on paper by hand. Still, with some of the artwork it can be faster and easier to hand-sketch it.

"The monsters are produced in exactly the same way as they were in *Ico*. The software used has changed a bit, but the policy of animation design is the same. Only this time, most of the monsters are huge. The huge animals that exist in real life do not have any unnecessary movements. Their skin, muscles and bones have a wonderful motion. In order to give the feeling of great size, smooth motion is necessary and I am most careful to reproduce this. Huge things lack some of the poses and motions of small ones. All the actions need to be smooth and must connect from one to another, and this is where our animators are having the most difficulties."





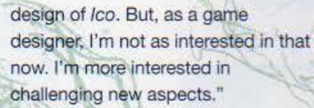


Udea: "The smart player will use various tactics to go against the organic deforming monsters. Normally, stages in videogames are fixed, but with movable stages, the game can offer options and solutions"





"For general monster concept design we tried to blend uncommon and common motifs, like taking a building and a real-life animal"



design of *Ico*. But, as a game designer, I'm not as interested in that now. I'm more interested in challenging new aspects."

So, in search of a new challenge, Ueda shuns the confines of companion-driven castle exploration for something spectacularly different. In *Ico 2*, the player rides horseback across a vast tract of open countryside, hunting huge, towering monsters. Silhouetted against the horizon, the creatures are shambling giants carved from giant blocks of stone. There are many different types – we've seen at least 12, ranging from gothic armadillos the size of a tank to skyscraper-tall masonry-ribbed men and mammoth rock dragons – and they are variously intimidating, powerful, magical and ancient. The creatures are *Ico 2*'s core.

"We thought that we should avoid creating stereotyped creatures that are commonly used in videogames," says Ueda. "So, for general monster concept design we tried to blend uncommon and common motifs, like taking a building and a real-life animal, or a mask from an ancient tribe and a different animal. We're trying to create creatures that not only convey the impression of simple terror but also mysteriousness, oddness."

The creatures are also *Ico 2*'s most concrete link to its predecessor. The physical challenge in the first game was in conquering a castle through logic, dexterity and spatial awareness. Here, the challenge is the same, with the giant monsters acting as huge, moving castles. The player must use acrobatics and timing to climb their way up, across or around the monster's body to reach its weak point and attack.

The size isn't just superficial. Every part of the enemy is a part to be explored, as Ueda reveals: "Huge monsters appear in many videogames, but I think the creation of those monsters was a part of presentation. The monsters' bodies are a part of the fields you have to conquer, so monster design and level design are closely related."

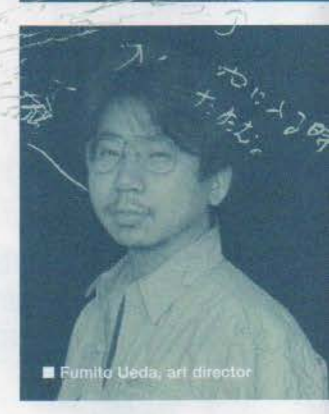
Climbing a moving surface is clearly a dynamic task, forcing the player to constantly react to new angles and new situations. At some points the hero thrusts his sword deep into his foe's hide, not to attack, but for extra grip. Early versions of the code feature an on-screen friction meter, which indicates how well the hero is holding on to the shifting surface. The meter may not make it into the final game, but that – and other (conceivably placeholder) on-screen furniture, like health bars and the diagrams that reveal the enemy's weak points – reveal another change in philosophy which may upset *Ico* purists.

"In *Ico*, the reason why we didn't indicate any bars or maps was not only because we wanted to cut off all things that may be in the way of emotional involvement, but because we wanted to make a clear differentiation with other games," says Ueda. "We didn't want to make it look like a videogame.

"However, on the other hand, this restricted us in many respects, including game design. This time, we have released all those constraints and are creating a very neutral status. If those indications are necessary to make the game more fun, we will include them. If they aren't necessary, we won't. There may be such maps and bars, and maybe not."



Kenji Kaido, producer



Fumito Ueda, art director

A view of the mountains

Another element which may be of concern to some is the camera: *Ico 2* is switching from the beautifully handled fixed perspectives of the first game to a potentially troublesome type of thirdperson view. Ueda's team has handled the change pragmatically. "There's almost no fixed camera system like the kind used in *Ico*," he says. "Since the main character freely moves around in 3D space, the camera is set right behind. However, because of where the camera is set up, screens tend to be too flat and symmetrical. So we sometimes try to displace the position of the camera slightly to break the monotony."

Above all that, anything else is speculation. Partly because Ueda is reticent when it comes to plot and gameplay specifics, but also because *Ico 2* is still at a flexible stage of development, and things can change when you've got as organic an attitude to game design as his team. For example, it's undecided how the combat sequences will be linked, although it seems there's some freedom of choice on the part of the player, the 'hub' of the landscape being a central building called Hokora.

The inky black evil that pervades the first game can be witnessed flooding from the quivering bodies of downed creatures

The game universe appears to be the same, too, although Ueda refuses to talk about how the two games connect ("No comment, please. All we can tell you now is that we're not thinking of this as a sequel"). Despite that, the inky black evil that pervades the first game can be witnessed flooding from the quivering bodies of downed creatures. Early code shows tantalising glimpses of a small group of boys riding rings around a lumbering, three-storey-high monster. A boy, a red poncho, a helmet, two horns… Yes, it's early code, but maybe, just maybe…

Take the path of courage

You can speculate further. Creating a startling follow-up to such an impressive debut was never going to be easy, but the team has taken a brave route, sidestepping *Ico*'s legacy by creating something new. Ueda says the biggest challenge, technically, was creating the technology required to let the player move their way around complex dynamic surfaces. More than issues of mechanical design, though, his answer is much more revealing. The most difficult thing about designing *Ico 2*? "To be released from the spell of *Ico*. In a good way."

That's the biggest problem Sony will have, and the biggest problem *Ico* fans will have with the next generation of storytelling. There is no Yorda, no castle, no primitive stick combat with creatures you used to dream lived under your bed. There is no reason we will find out what happened, no reason we'd want to. There's no *room* for a straight *Ico* sequel and no point, since it was a dream, perfect, shining, self-contained and now over.

But that game can still have its fairytale ending. If Ueda and his team achieve what they've set out to – if *Ico 2* is as big a critical success as its older brother, if it successfully transports the essence of the original into a completely new dynamic, and if, if, that big, ugly, beautiful if, it succeeds at retail – then *Ico* becomes relevant again, and gaming can start to learn everything about storytelling, maturity and the soul, everything it should have learned the first time around. Until then, we close the book, and wait.



Udea: "Huge monsters appear in various different games, but with such significance in their size and design, I think this game is probably the first." Monsters act like moving platforming sections, with a goal to be reached





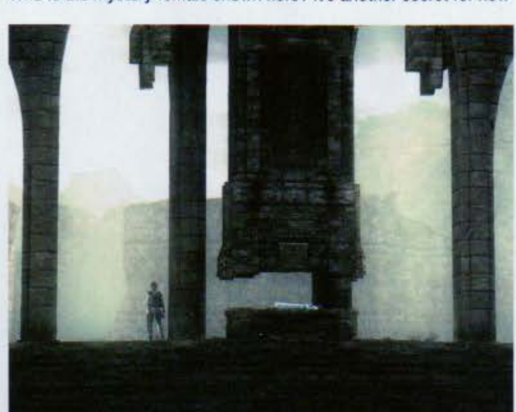




Ueda isn't sure if the player will use a map to guide themselves around the landscape. "We are currently studying some ideas," he says. "We will select the one that suits the game best at the end." Who is the mystery female shown here? It's another secret for now



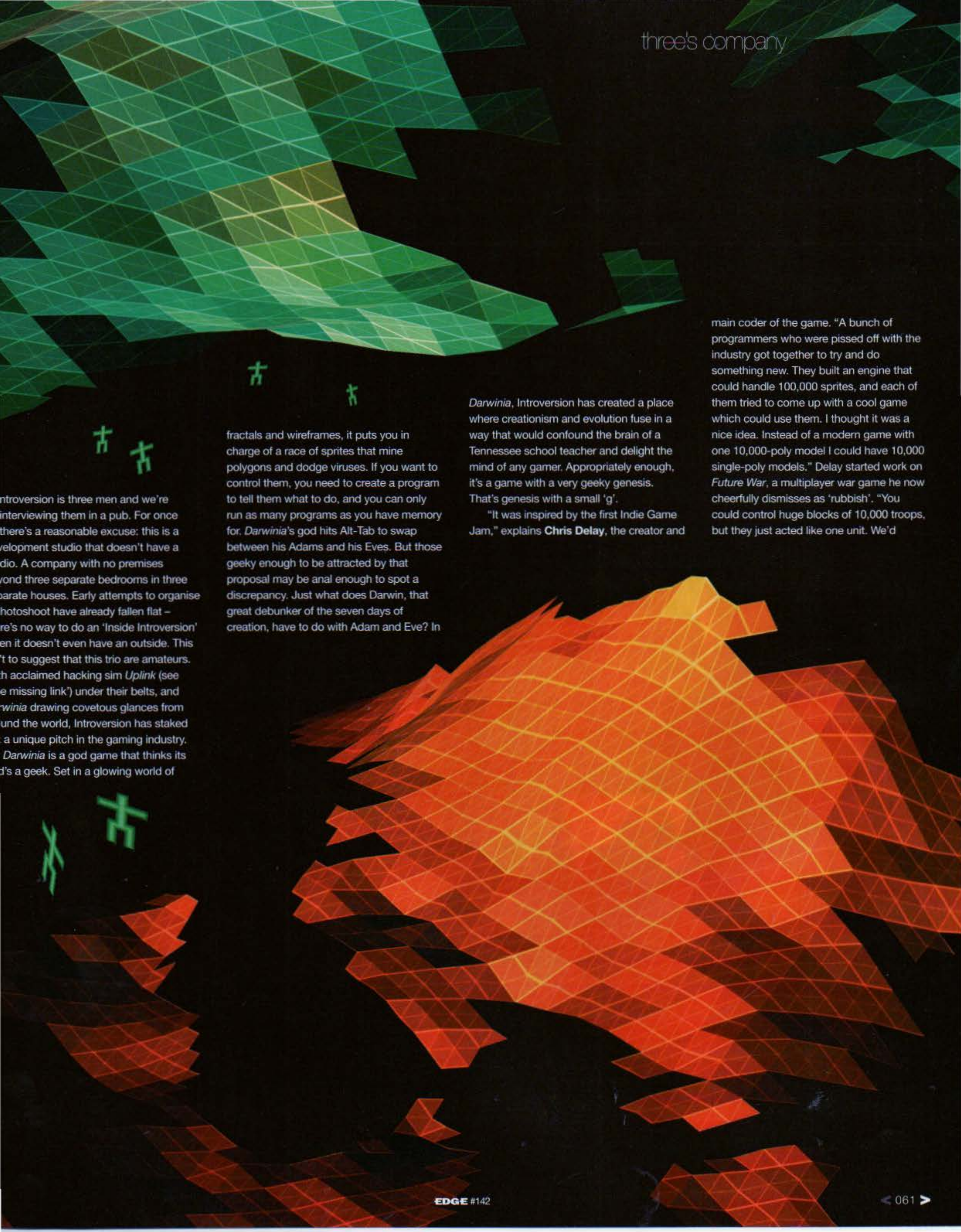






Three's company

The Introversion team call themselves the last of the bedroom programmers, but they may be the first of a new religion of game production...



ntroversion is three men and we're interviewing them in a pub. For once there's a reasonable excuse: this is a velopment studio that doesn't have a dio. A company with no premises yond three separate bedrooms in three parate houses. Early attempts to organise hotoshoot have already fallen flat – re's no way to do an 'Inside Introversion' en it doesn't even have an outside. This 't to suggest that this trio are amateurs. h acclaimed hacking sim *Uplink* (see e missing link') under their belts, and rwinia drawing covetous glances from und the world, Introversion has staked a unique pitch in the gaming industry.

Darwinia is a god game that thinks its d's a geek. Set in a glowing world of fractals and wireframes, it puts you in charge of a race of sprites that mine polygons and dodge viruses. If you want to control them, you need to create a program to tell them what to do, and you can only run as many programs as you have memory for. *Darwinia*'s god hits Alt-Tab to swap between his Adams and his Eves. But those geeky enough to be attracted by that proposal may be anal enough to spot a discrepancy. Just what does Darwin, that great debunker of the seven days of creation, have to do with Adam and Eve? In *Darwinia*, Introversion has created a place where creationism and evolution fuse in a way that would confound the brain of a Tennessee school teacher and delight the mind of any gamer. Appropriately enough, it's a game with a very geeky genesis. That's genesis with a small 'g'.

"It was inspired by the first Indie Game Jam," explains **Chris Delay**, the creator and main coder of the game. "A bunch of programmers who were pissed off with the industry got together to try and do something new. They built an engine that could handle 100,000 sprites, and each of them tried to come up with a cool game which could use them. I thought it was a nice idea. Instead of a modern game with one 10,000-poly model I could have 10,000 single-poly models." Delay started work on *Future War*, a multiplayer war game he now cheerfully dismisses as 'rubbish'. "You could control huge blocks of 10,000 troops, but they just acted like one unit. We'd



Darwinia's hub world places you in a bowl, the sky filling with the souls of the dead Darwinians you've failed to save. A twist in the tale is promised, but Introversion won't part with any details

ended up creating a 10,000-poly model after all – just one made up of 10,000 identical polys."

Delay took a decision to junk *Future War*'s gameplay, but he already knew the world he'd created around it would stay: "We always knew the landscape was going to be generated from fractals, just to get the fine detail done. It's a content thing – we're such a small team we can't create detailed landscape models in 3DS Max or whatever – that takes months and we don't have a single artist on board. So with fractals we figured out we could make everything very cool and retro without actually needing any advanced artwork at all." Indeed, *Darwinia* is the creation of a core team of just four: Delay, co-author Andy Bainbridge and sound designers Alistair Lindsay and Michael Maidment.

'Retro' is a word that's gets thrown at *Darwinia* a lot, but this isn't a lazy exercise in arcade nostalgia, even though when you call up an air strike a flock of Invader-esque foes pulse in from the *Tetris*-blocked sky and let loose destruction with a raw, zapping crackle. "The sound was something we wanted to get right from the beginning," reveals Delay. "To begin with we were working with emulated arcade and SID chips, trying to get that retro sound. But it wasn't enough, it wasn't right. So we switched to using the modern technology, to manipulating noises straight off the sound card." The result is impressive – a sweeping soundscape which modulates as you swoop through the levels. But isn't it a different kind of 'retro' – not so much copying the sounds of old games but copying the techniques and approach that created them? Delay laughs: "Yeah, I guess you could say that. Not so much method acting as method programming."

Playing *Darwinia* is neither painfully retro nor startlingly modern. Using the kind of basic resource management and RTS tactics which many god games rely on, each level sets you and your Darwinians (as the single-poly citizens of Darwinia are known) a different kind of task. You can't control them directly. You'll need to marshal them by running different programs – engineers to fix Darwinia's machines, officers to point the Darwinians in the right direction, and squads to protect them while they move. Any energy you find along the way can be reprocessed into more Darwinians, and as you complete each level you discover it builds into one giant, continuous system.





Tom Arundel, top, looks after translations and ports. Chris Delay remains the creative force

The reason this is so compelling is that, alongside its unforgettable visuals, *Darwinia* has also evolved an extraordinary story. The world of Darwinia isn't a natural phenomenon. It was created as a digital theme world by the mysterious Dr Sepulveda – a Jurassic Park for polygons. (Why Dr Sepulveda? "Well," answers Delay, "we were driving down Sepulveda Avenue in LA one E3 and Mark (Morris, Introversion's overall director) said it was a great name for a baddie. I thought he was right and wrote it down in my notebook. If someone's called Dr Sepulveda you immediately know some things about him. For example, you immediately know he's insane.") Housed in a massive mainframe of Protologic 68000s, Darwinia is a world where the single-poly Darwinians, with their single-line AI, can grow and evolve. And where the world can visit to see them gambolling in their natural, fractal habitat.

Except, when you arrive, something has gone horribly wrong. Darwinia has been infected by a virus, and Dr Sepulveda (it's worth mentioning that alpha versions of the game represented him with a photo of Sir Clive Sinclair) is panicking, watching



Mark Morris acts as the company's director, but it's clear he won't always get the last word



cades of research being corrupted and nsumed. He asks you to help, giving you cess to the combat programs he'd vised as the park's fairground rides – nple shooting games that were meant to the Darwinians through their paces. It on becomes clear this isn't enough, and t triggers the third aspect of the meplay – evolution. In order to defeat the us, you'll need to evolve the Darwinians d the programs that control them. Each v level makes them smarter and more ngerous, ready for the threat of virus-uced monsters.

Far from being a straightforward war of ition between faceless Darwinians and swarming viri (Introversion doesn't shy away from using Latinate plurals), *Darwinia* has a subtle and complex spirituality. The energy which powers each Darwinian can't be destroyed, even if they are killed. It will sit, glowing, on the ground until gathered up and reprocessed. If left too long it will float away, and the bereaved Darwinians left behind will gather to fly candle-holding kites as a memorial to those they've lost. It's a bizarrely moving sight, but one which ties in tightly to the gameplay. That same formless energy can be captured and converted into troops by the enemy, and one particularly nasty foe lays empty eggs behind enemy lines. Kill the frontline troops and the viri will cart their energy to the eggs, fertilising them and hatching more viri. It's a vicious piece of enemy design that ensures the game can never be won by brute strength of numbers.

t a time when large developers and ublishers are struggling, how can uch a tiny outfit be prospering?

Introversion's website reveals the hallmarks of its anti-corporate stance. *Darwinia* is scheduled for a January 2005 release, but the expectation of meeting that deadline is listed plainly as 'low'. It's a diverting honesty which hasn't harmed the hype the game has generated. Introversion has recruited a select group of beta testers from its own forums, and *Darwinia* has already spawned a fledgling mod community and generated faqs and fan sites. So, at a time when large developers and publishers are struggling to stay afloat, how can such a tiny outfit be prospering so successfully? Just what is their secret?

The first is that they're smart. Delay, **Mark Morris** and **Tom Arundel** (who oversees Interversion's finances) met at Imperial College, London, where they were all staying in the same halls. "It was already a pretty geeky university," explains Morris, "and we'd all asked to go into a hall which had internet access. In a community of geeks we'd picked out the ubergeeks."

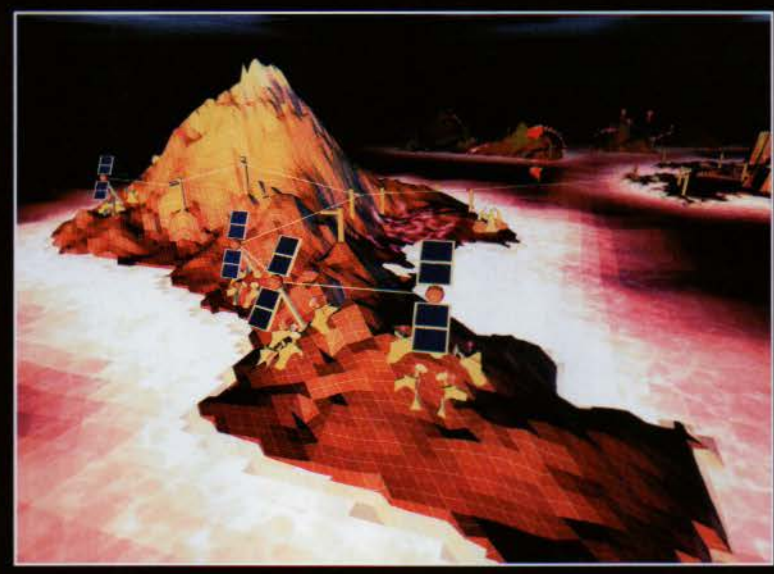
They can't now remember how they met, but during long summers of shooting BB pellets at each other and dropping well-wrapped eggs off roofs, they became friends and found a flat together. Delay eventually let slip that he was making a game (*Uplink*) and Arundel ("He's always been a mini-Branson" accuses Morris, happily) suggested they enter it in Imperial's entrepreneur competition, convinced they could put together a business plan to win them the £3,000 prize.

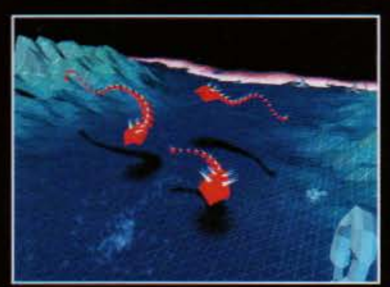
They lost the competition, but decided to give it a go anyhow. Staking £200 each, they released *Uplink* for sale over the internet. Arundel grins: "We broke even in

Game: **Darwinia**
Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Introversion**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **January 2005**



ere's no in-game interface. Everything is trolled from five central menu screens, n units created through mouse gestures







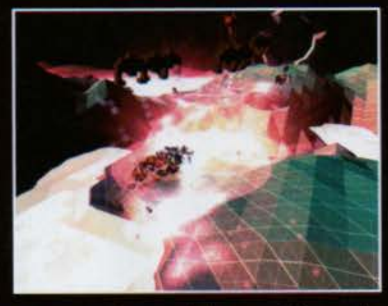
the first month." Distributed by Pinnacle, sold at HMV and converted for Mac, the game sold well enough to support Introversion for the next three years and fund *Darwinia*'s development. Imperial ought to be kicking themselves.

But how do you sell a game no one knows about, made by people no one's heard of? "I faked forum posts," reveals Delay, with slightly guilty pride. "I picked some really busy forums and registered anonymously. 'Have you seen this weird little game? It's really good'. That sort of thing." It did the trick. Even moderate sales represented a stunning return for the team. "We're a true dot.com," says Morris. "We don't have an office, our costs are just our time and three laptops. We can run with almost nothing in the bank. It means that no matter how bad things get, Introversion can survive. We can't go bankrupt – we've got nothing to lose. The worst that could happen is that we'd have to get day jobs again, and things would just... slow down." It means that well over 90 per cent of the



Darwinia will come with a map editor – there's already a busy mod community of beta testers





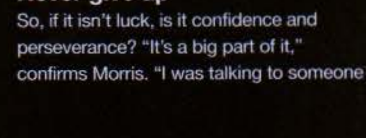
The viri, swarming like a demented one-way system, are your main enemy in the game. They can be taken out with dozens of single shots from your squad, or you can call in a massive, deadly airstrike

"We don't have an office, our costs are just our time and three laptops. We can run with almost nothing in the bank"

retail price of their games goes directly to the team. "If we're selling the game for £30, then every sale is a tenner in each of our pockets," asserts Thomas. "And a tenner is real money." A tenner each, we wonder. Is that really how things get split? And with that, the interview is suspended for five minutes as Introversion laughs itself blue.

It's an irresistible business model, but it still isn't enough to explain the team's success. Any other bedroom-based outfit would have the same advantages, and yet there are very few startups who've had Introversion's success. There must be more to it. "Luck," announces Arundel "I've been involved in all sorts of business and..."

"Don't buy any chairs from him!" interrupts Morris "Seriously." Arundel smiles and glares at him. "I've been involved in all sorts of businesses, and not all of them have worked out. We've been very lucky." Morris sobers: "It's true. You can look at the history of Introversion and trace the points of failure, the things that if they hadn't happened – say if Pinnacle hadn't agreed to distribute us – then we would have fallen over." So how did you talk them into it? "We rang every distributor once a month for three months and begged," explains Arundel. "Eventually, Pinnacle agreed to see us, and we went to them with an email from PC Gamer, telling us we could use some quotes from them about how much they liked *Uplink*. They decided to take a risk with us, and that changed everything." But, we suggest, that doesn't sound much like luck. It sounds like a pretty straightforward mix of a good game, making contacts and

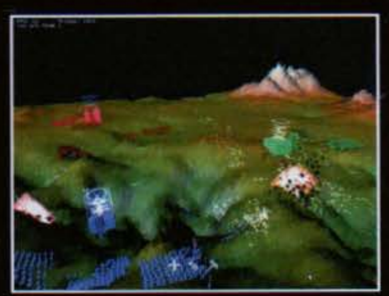


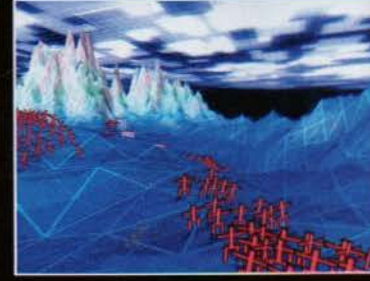
Squads can't be dispatched freely. You'll need to take over control buildings before you dispatch them through the teleporter

refusing to give up. Introversion pauses to consider. "You know," says Morris, "you're right. We *are* shit hot." More laughs. We begin to ponder how wise it was to hold the interview in a pub.

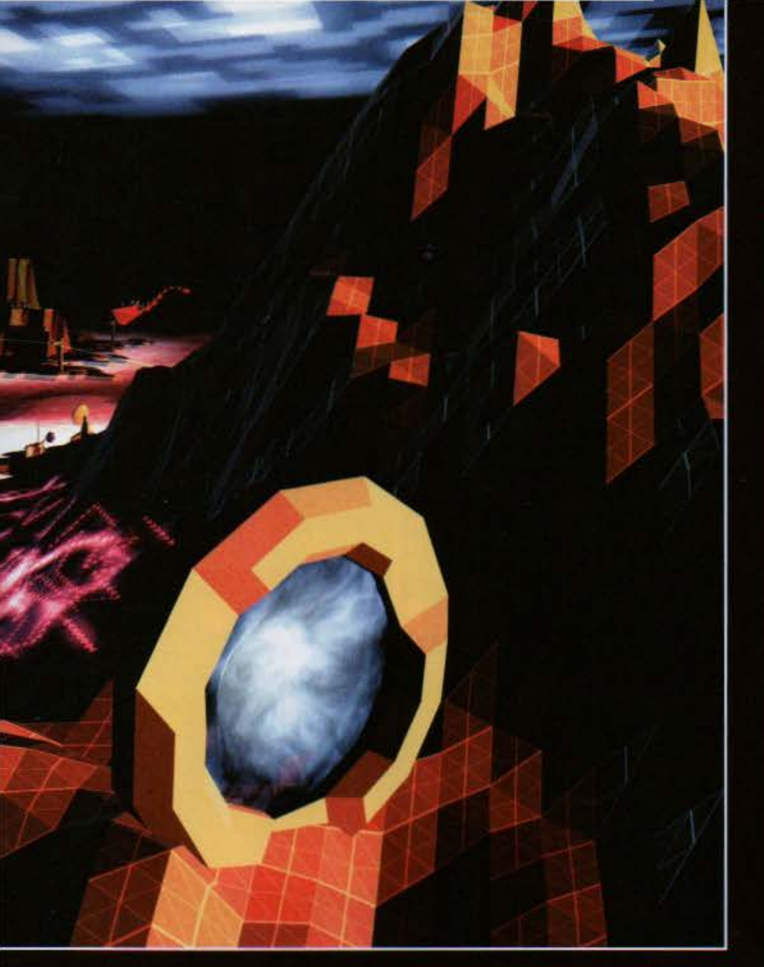
Never give up

So, if it isn't luck, is it confidence and perseverance? "It's a big part of it," confirms Morris. "I was talking to someone





Darwinia inherited a number of elements from *Future War* (left), the game originally inspired by the 100,000-poly army. The fractal mountain ranges stayed, but the regimented sprites were



The missing link

Uplink (released in 2000) wasn't Delay's first game, but it was an object lesson in how to create gaming depth from very simple resources. Employed as a hacker by a faceless corporation, you accepted tasks via email, then routed your calls to slow down traces while you stole valuable files and deleted evidence of your tampering. The game's tactical element required you to upgrade your PC and your servers, buying sophisticated hacking programmes and investing in enough memory to run them all at once. The heart of the game remains the live hacks themselves, however. Few games have replicated the crushing stress as you try to will that file to copy faster as the trace beeps nearer and your time ticks down. The wonderful irony of the game is that, despite its functional (though stylish) graphics, it takes you closer to the sensation of being in a movie than a thousand mo-capped, bump-mapped extravaganzas. The way your real-world surroundings enhance the game atmosphere – the pool of light from your lamp, the creak of your desk chair as you rock nervously through a password hack – provide the kind of immersion which for once makes the use of the word justified.

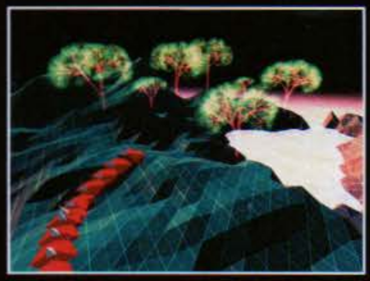
Uplink can still be ordered from Introversion's website at www.introversion.co.uk



other day and she said, 'Oh, I wouldn't w where to start…' and I thought, well, and Thomas would. We always know re to start. We won't necessarily know to solve a problem, but we'll always a way to try. When we wanted to get *nk* stocked in the shops we just walked HMV and asked the guy behind the till could put it on the shelves. It sounds pid, but he called the manager, and the ager told us we'd need a distributor, we went and got one and HMV put it he shelves."

Arundel breaks in: "Some people are scared to pick up the phone. That sn't get you anywhere. Doesn't matter e person on the other end takes the out of you. So what?"

However you explain its success, version has managed to make a name tself. It doesn't mean it's all plain sailing. blems with a US distributor have left the n operating with no money for the last e months. "I don't get terrified," says ris. "Chris does. He wakes up cking, but it's just a cashflow thing. It's kind of thing that happens to small



businesses. We know were going to sell a fair few copies of *Darwinia* and we know that's money straight into our pockets." Isn't it frustrating, though, after the success of *Uplink*, to still be talking about having to get day jobs? "Not at all," says Morris. "We're not in the same position we were then. We're sitting here with you, for a start, getting a feature written on the game before it comes out."

So how about if EA Partners came to call, with some big money up its sleeve? Would you sell out? Arundel grins: "If EAP said here's $2million, we'd say yes like a shot. But six months later we'd have left, and there'd be a new company with a new name made of Mark, Chris and Tom."

"We'd have to leave," agrees Morris. "It's simple. What Introversion do, to be completely candid – you know, it was a good idea to bring us to the pub. What Introversion do is sell Chris's games. And Chris is a complete bastard. He wouldn't last five minutes at EA."

"It's true," grins Delay. "I got fired from my last development job." "He's the kind of guy who won't do any work for two weeks. It's like writer's block," Morris explains, "but we tolerate it because we have to. What choice do we have? What it comes down to is the team of people. I seriously don't believe you could swap any of us out and have it still work."

There are some strange grammatical traditions which apply to companies. Although they can be made up of hundreds of people, you refer to them in the singular. Many become one. Or, in this case, three become one. It seems impossibly appropriate that *Darwinia*, with its weird mix of science and religion, has been created by a trinity. Good things, it seems, definitely come in threes.

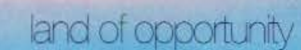


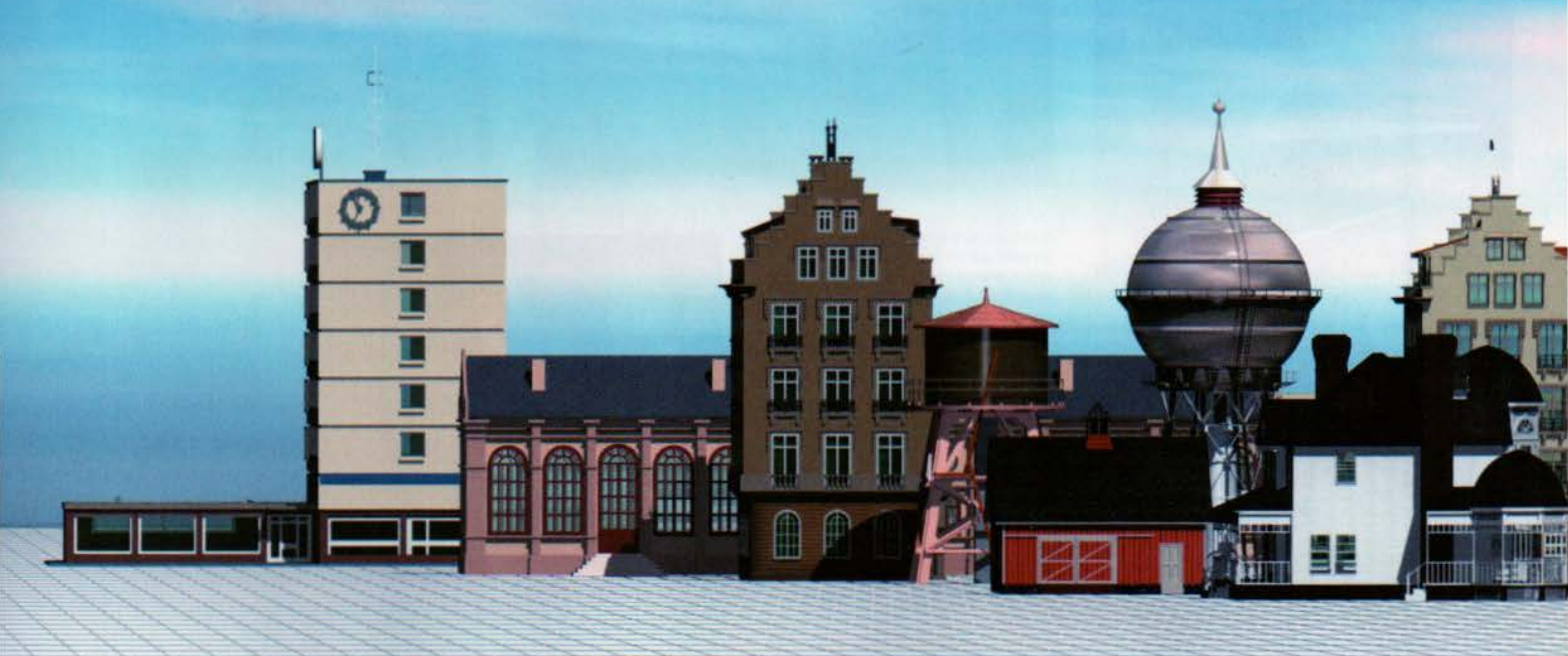


Preparing *Uplink* was a true labour of love. Tempers still fray over who put the hours in



Illustration: Alex Pang





_and of opportunity

ou can fly. You can fight. You can do anything you like in a Second Life

Sparkling into existence, it appears in stages. First the land, the sea and the sky are split apart. Then comes the detail, the terrain folding itself, creating paths, hills and valleys. The sun warps into position, and houses, white picket fences and mountain lodges drop rom nothing. The people fill the final space, morphing from grey bodies into colourful avatars: shapes and sizes. There goes an eight-foot Tonka robot, following his friend, the elf. They turn greet, wave, and move on. In one bound, they launch themselves high into the ether, taking nt. And you're left standing, gaping at this virtual world – a land of opportunity.

Second Life is staggering. It's nominally a massively multiplayer game, but so far in advance he typical genre efforts the term feels like a millstone. It's a creative place, built not by a single developer, but by its users. Embedded within the interface is a set of 3D modelling and animating tools, scripting languages and art packages. The developer, Linden Labs, maintains servers, keeps the world running day in, day out, and provides customer support, but the rest of the work – the architecture, the 'content' creation, the entertainment – is provided by the residents. Players build together, create their own amusement parks, dungeons, race tracks or battlezones and invite their peers, and the rest of the population, in to marvel at their work and to play together.

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Linden Research, Inc
Developer:	In-house
Origin:	US
Release:	Out now (secondlife.com)







Second Life's first alpine resort opened within the last month. It offers skidoo races, along with snowboarding and skiing – for a price







Within ten minutes of entering *Second Life*, players are taught how to modify their avatar and reconstruct the land around them. More advanced building techniques can be learned later on



Second Life does things differently. The objects you create in the world are your intellectual property; you own the rights

Cory Ondrejka is Linden Labs' VP of product development, and the nominal 'owner' of this place. His background is in traditional videogame production – after stints working for Acclaim's coin-op division and Pacific Coast Power And Light he joined Linden Labs, partly as an attempt to find answers to the troubles the industry faces. "I was looking at escalating production costs and thinking: 'We're five years away from all games being done by four studios, or four publishers'," he explains. "So what's going to happen – you're going to see massive loss of originality, publishers are going to be massively risk-averse. I look at the general online space as an opportunity for everyone to get back into the garage-game mentality."

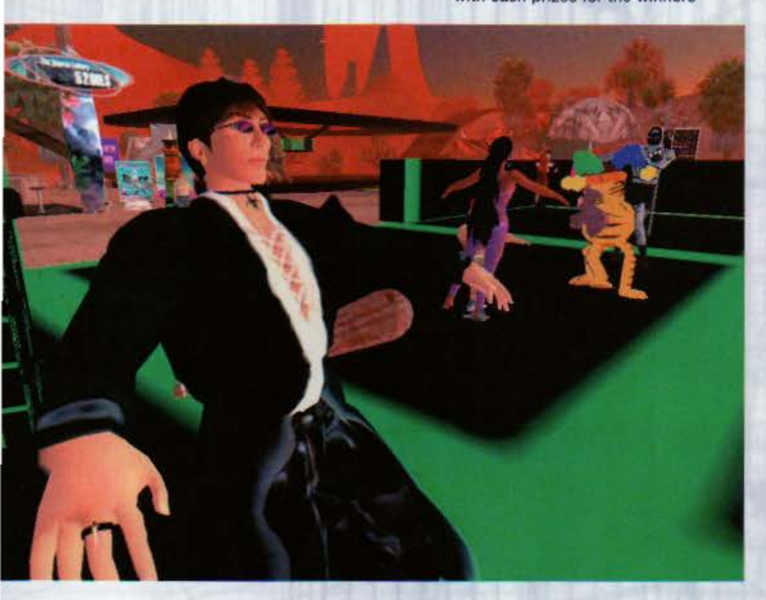
Typical MMORPGs include a draconian licensing agreement, forbidding the end user from claiming ownership over the money and objects they quest for. Attempts to then sell these objects over eBay or specialist websites like the Gaming Open Market is met with instantaneous deletion of accounts, clampdowns and removal from the game. That's despite the enormous market for virtual goods, rumoured to value $20m (£11.2m) in the US alone – in Asia that value is expected to be an order of magnitude larger.

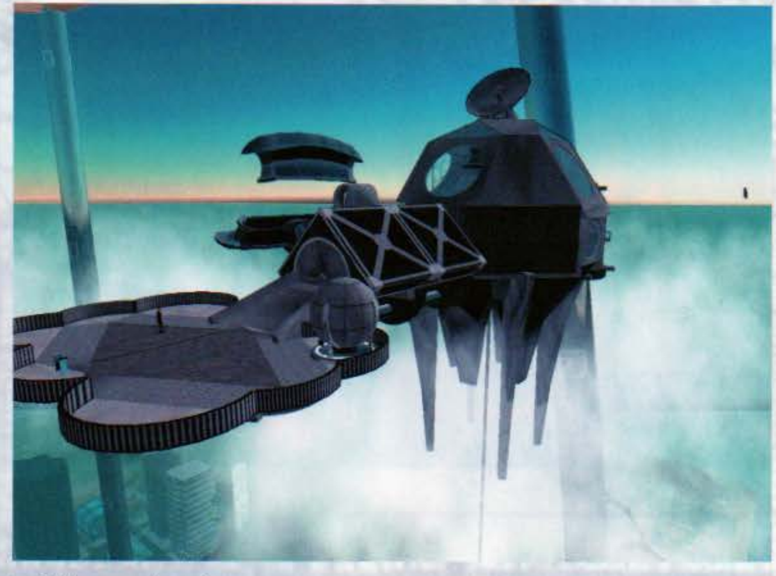
Second Life does things differently. The objects you create in the world are your intellectual property; you own the rights. What's more, Linden Labs openly encourages trade in *Second Life*'s own currency, the Linden Dollar. Why? "The long-term success of *Second Life* is driven by the innovation of our residents as much as it's driven by the innovation of us, as developers," explains Ondrejka. "How do we maximise the ability of our residents, the players, to innovate in this space? Historically, what you need to drive innovation is markets, and markets derive from ownership." The result: an ever-increasing tide of new players entering *Second Life*, not just to play the game but determined to make real money out of it, building the very best in virtual entertainment. Professional scripters design jetpacks, automatic rifles, furniture and houses, charging token fees to own or use their creations. The proceeds in L$ are converted to US$, forming a tidy stipend.

This is a breed apart from the typical online gamer. Most noticeable in Linden's own demographic figures is that the playtime is split equally between male and female residents. According to Ondrejka, female players are the leaders in the world: "One of our first really big money-makers in the world was an event planner, so in *Second Life* she became… an event



While all players can 'fly', buying a speeder will allow you to flit between zones in a fraction of the time. Players will also arrange race meets, with cash prizes for the winners





Inevitably, some players favour creating avatars that resemble recognisable film or TV characters. Bodies shaped like Neo, Garfield and Kermit all command high prices

Back to school

Due to the complexity of the in-game tools, Linden holds tutorial sessions where primitives are placed, resized and assembled into objects as a cooperative – one player lines them up, the other controls the sliders. It's another area where users have found their place. Three actively competing universities have been set up within the world just to teach crafting techniques.







Second Life is rated 18, with good reason. Much of the content is 'mature', with S&M roleplay, slave auctions and virtual wifeswapping alongside sitting around in the pool

anner, organising weddings. This was the kind of event planning she'd always dreamed about. ne could go to enormous degrees – not only finding out what kind of dress you wanted, but she ould get the entire church built. There was a huge demand for her skills – sending out vitations, bringing in the guests, arranging the flowers…"

That reflection of real-world skills is a thread that runs throughout the virtual world. The most npressive scripters are programmers by day, programmers by night. Those managing the larger uilding projects, the 300-foot animated dragons, are managers by day, too. Web designers eate clothing, cars, aeroplanes, whatever they want. The difference between their day jobs and *econd Life* is simple: they really can create whatever they want – the only limit being time and eativity. "Nobody's ever had that experience of building with someone before," says Ondrejka. 's a hook – you experience that, and you want it everywhere else. That was one of the real iving forces on the technology side. Collaborative, realtime, realtime, realtime. Every time we'd y to ourselves: 'Why don't we make this an offline tool?' then smack! 'No. You've got to be ble to do this with other people. It's part of what makes this so different'."

The first object players build is their avatar, immediately upon entering the tutorial. Even as they emerge onto the new user promenade, it's not finished – residents spend hours tweaking their virtual representation. Two fashions emerge: some spend each day wearing a new body, be it an animated Casper, rounded Lego-head or goth stilt-walker; others create the perfect representation of themselves, then simply change their clothes. Then it's on to houses, purchasing perfect furniture or designing your own decorations. Then, with the appropriate skills, something larger…

Taking to the skies

Above the Cubey Terra Aerodrome, that naïve vision, the idea that players would innovate in their own way, is a reality. A rocket-propelled dropship has opened its bay doors: a group of five skydivers twist and tumble in the air, drawing smoke





With land costing upwards of $300, arenas for maxi-robo war are in high demand. Book early to avoid the disappointment of being left out

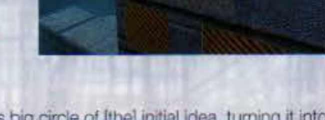
News and views

Due to the scale of *Second Life*, with its 5,000 acres' worth of content, players have spotted an easy niche: running in-game magazines and listings. Typically, magazines are small white blocks, textured with a screen grab from *Second Life*. 'Touching' them will stream text, including news, comment pieces, and wildly diverse thoughts. The makers have even taken to selling ad space. Second Life Magazine is the largest, and has spilled out into its own web presence. Browse the archives at secondlifemag.visit.ws





Residents who've remained within *Second Life* since the early beta have built huge and intricate structures. This Disney-esque castle has become something of a tourist attraction



patterns in the sky. On the ground, a jury of seven mark the competitors on style and grace. The lead judge is a stern-faced brain. In a jar.

Skydiving is the latest trend to hit *Second Life*, a fad that's developed its own sub-community and provides a fascinating parable for the way the game subsumes initiative. "It's really been one of the first great examples of somebody taking an idea the whole way, crafting a whole new experience," says Ondrejka. "The Cubey Terra Aerodrome realised that jumping with a parachute is really, really cool. So what do they do next? They open up classes to teach other people how to use their skydiving equipment. They give away the old, not-quite-as-good version of their skydiving equipment, but sell the really good stuff. They start building aeroplanes and dropships, so you and your friends can go skydiving together before holding competitions. Just like the real world, you're closing this big circle of [the] initial idea, turning it into a product if you want to and reaching out to this community, asking them to join you."

The cost of living

The most valuable resource in *Second Life* is land. It's the selling and purchase of territory that drives the game, as creations only have permanence if you own the land they sit on. Once, Linden tried charging for the upload of content through elaborate taxation, but the residents revolted, throwing crates of virtual tea into the virtual sea. Now, the company simply auctions off space – as Ondrejka explains, Linden has trouble satisfying the demand: "Once you're in the world you see all these racetracks and stores and balloons and brilliant stuff, and you say: 'Gosh, how do I do that?' And the answer is: buy the land that it's on. If you buy the land that it's on, it's yours. You can earn money from it, you can build on it, you can just play with it… It's yours, you can just do whatever you want to do. It actually goes for auction because we just can't make new areas fast enough to meet demand. Land prices have been sitting around $150-200 for the right to own it, and then that acre costs $25 a month to upkeep."

That land can drive conflict. Early in *Second Life*'s beta testing, a small group of players from *World War 2 Online* poked around inside the world, experimenting with the creation tools to plan





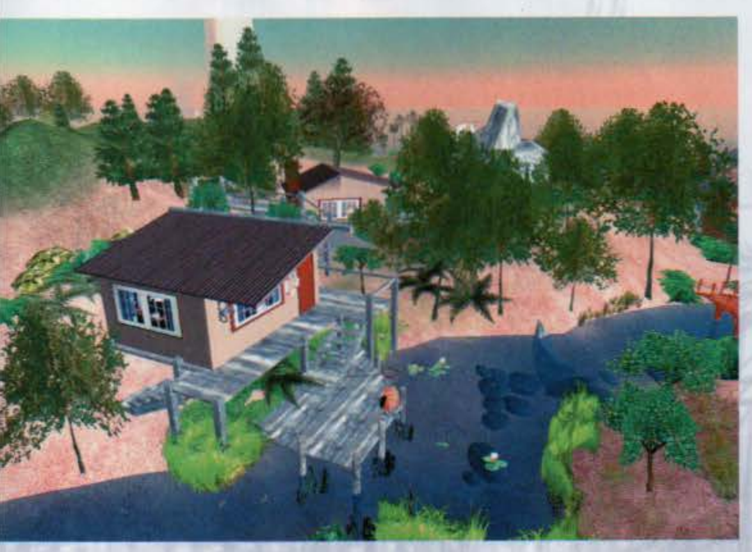


The skydiving costumes include an altimeter, main and reserve chutes, and even a skyboard for those moments when you fancy showing off









The largest shopping malls draw customers from throughout the world. Home decorations are the most popular items with customers



"People really get hooked by these spaces, because they're so different to their lives. They buy into the idea that this is a place"

w tactics for their time in *WW2O*. They met with immediate success, and invited their friends o the beta. According to Ondrejka, there was an immediate clash of cultures: "It was a bstantial change to our demographic. Suddenly we're presented with a community of a few ndred people, a good percentage of whom are these *WW2O* players, asking: 'Who do I oot?' The users who'd been here for longer weren't necessarily looking for someone to shoot, t, boy, did they know how to make guns. All these gun stores sprang up around their ubhouse, before massive battles broke out. Eventually, it all settled down as we decided to e the *WW2 Onliners* this one simulator: a 16-acre square named Jessie."

Jessie has taken on an almost mythic status within *Second Life* – it's the place you go to get ot. The *WW2 Onliners* are hugely territorial and object to the neighbours flying their hot-air lloons or staging future wars over their airspace. Meanwhile, the shopping precinct next door s to deal with tank shells and bazooka rounds landing in their pavilion day and night.

Stranger still are the real-world ties – the potential for business and academia. Urban planning a regular fixture in the world, testing pathways and arguing architectural theory with anyone o'll listen, including Ondrejka: "We had a group of University of Austin, Texas, students who ent their entire semester arguing that you shouldn't be able to fly, because flying destroys mmunity. They'd build paths everywhere, post signs in the air that read 'You should be walking' d post these long declarations about why flying is wrong. How ironic: Luddites in a virtual world." A group from the University of California Davis Medical Centre has used the embedded tools to design a simulation of schizophrenia for doctors and relatives of patients. Linden is actively courting business, hoping to demonstrate new ways of working remotely based on the activities of in-game collectives.

And the world keeps growing. *Second Life* teems with activity: 5,000 acres of space, a million user-created objects, 10,000 residents… each in the world for one reason: to be amazed. Ondrejka understands the root appeal: "People really get hooked by these spaces, because they're so different to their normal lives. They really buy into the idea that this is a place. Everything gets simpler when you think of it as a place rather than a game. Of course there are economic ties. Of course you own what you make. Of course all of these other rules make sense… because it's a place."


GAMING IS HERE

REACHING OUT

After decades of development, gaming still boils down to that microsecond when two contacts meet under the fire button. But can peripherals revolutionise the games we play and the people who play them?

The question 'Do you invert?' is gaming's equivalent of an innie or an outie. It divides gamers up very neatly – not into categories of who does and who doesn't, but into categories of who knows what you're talking about and who thinks you're a loony. It's over 20 years since the NES set the blueprint for console controllers, and in that time a strange legacy of conventions has been built up that many dedicated gamers never even think about. For newcomers, however, they remain baffling. Why is this the jump button in one game and fire in another? What shoulders? How can you click a stick? Even when you master the bizarre abstraction of mapping the process of playing football on to 12 buttons, then you find that designers, manufacturers and even regions can't agree on a standard.

Even for the many millions who've built up their joypad capabilities over the years, there's another question. It's a common part of gaming lore that *Super Mario 64* was built around the N64 controller – immediately obvious to anyone who played it and often ignored by the many who tried to copy it. But how much does controller design shape the games we play? Just how limited has gaming been by the failure of the joypad to move beyond 'move with your left thumb and fire with your right'? After hundreds of false starts, it seems that gaming has finally reached a point where input mechanisms can truly diversify. EyeToy has proved it possible and now the camera, the full 3D motion sensing of Gametrak, the touchscreen and microphone of the Nintendo DS, along with others, point the way to a different future.

Let's not overlook those false starts, however. Why will these new devices be

any different from the last time the industry – and this magazine – trumpeted motion sensing as gaming's new dawn? Simply because they're not new. PCs have had digital cameras attached to them for years. PDAs have had touchscreens for as long as people have been shouting "I'm on a train" down their mobiles. Even Gametrak, the first device to deliver to the home user – reliably and affordably – the holy grail of 3D movement sensing, is almost comically simplistic. "It's just the same components you would find in an ordinary PS2 controller, only with a cord running through the middle. The cord is attached to a third potentiometer and a clock spring which, with some clever trigonometry, gives us depth," explains **Harry Holmwood**, marketing director of Gametrak's maker, In2Games. "It's a paperclip of a game controller," confirms **Steve Lavache**, the firm's technical director. "For years everyone's thrown money at the problem of 3D input, but the technology to do Gametrak has been there since the fishing rod was invented. Well, since the potentiometer was invented. You could have done this 100 years ago. Course, you'd have had nothing to plug it into."

So why now? For Holmwood, one factor was the PS2's universal interface: "The USB development was critical. It would have been technically possible to get Gametrak to work on PS1 or earlier Nintendo machines, but it would have been hard to get it launched because the manufacturers weren't necessarily interested in getting a thirdparty involved. With USB we could do it ourselves."

At Sony, the concept of EyeToy had existed since imaging specialist Richard Marx saw his first PS2. But, despite successful prototypes, SCEA couldn't see a way of turning the product into a game. For that, it took Sony's London Studio, whose game design ethos is guided by its development director **Jamie Macdonald**. "As a firstparty studio, our mission here is to broaden the appeal of PlayStation. We could do an EA and just go and buy the Harry Potter licence – well, saying that, I don't know how much it would cost – but anyway that's not why we're here." He also has a personal objective for the games he makes. "I wanted to make games that were accessible to everyone. I have lots of friends and family who come from the generation who never mastered the joypad, but who I knew would love gaming if they could get to grips with it. So I coined the idea of the 21st century parlour game." And with that, EyeToy evolved from neglected hardware to killer app.

"For years everyone's thrown money at 3D input, but the technology to do Gametrak has been there since the fishing rod was invented"

DOUBLED UP

Nintendo's DS is the machine which most boldly illustrates this new trend. With double screens, touch sensitivity and a built-in microphone, it's unapologetically schizophrenic in its determination to change the way you play. But for NCL spokesman **Yasuhiro Minagawa**, it's nothing new for Nintendo. "We have always come up with great gaming ideas first and then thought about the most appropriate input mechanism." True enough – Nintendo has bolted on tilt sensitivity with *Kirby's Tilt'n'Tumble* and voice recognition with *Hey You! Pikachu*, but these games have remained novelties. They've never made it stick. Why will this time be any different? "Well, I am afraid I always have to be very careful about indicating what our developers are doing. The great new ideas



The NES controller didn't just set the style for dozens of consoles that followed, it's since become an icon of '80s design and geek style

TOUCHING BASE

Reaction to the DS's touchscreen has so far been mixed. No one who touched it could resist the vegetable cutting game in *Wario Ware, Inc.*, but *Metroid Prime: Hunters* has yet to convince. Not that the DS will be the first touch-sensitive gaming device. Tapwave's Zodiac already has impressive capabilities, but little in the way of software that has capitalised on them. *MegaBowling* is masterfully intuitive, but lacks subtlety.

Tapwave's Zodiac 2

The finalised DS

e always paving new ways of itertainment, but they are ideas that can imitated very easily. In the case of the S, the microphone and touchscreen are in e hardware, and that will make the big fference for the creators and publishers to me up with new ideas more freely."

But will they? After the blaze of ssibility that surrounded the release of *eToy: Play*, it's had an underwhelming *ar. Groove* failed to resonate with the arket, and most other implementations of e technology have been either flawed or rangely familiar. "I am a bit disappointed th the other products which have come t using EyeToy," admits Macdonald, nkly. "They mostly just seem to have pied *Play* – a lot of what I've seen are fectively reskins of games we've done. It's ry flattering but a bit frustrating." Does is mean we've finally solved the problem the hardware only to find that current ftware developers don't have the novation to match it?

Gametrak's makers have also been frustrated with the inability of the development community to take the 3D sensing idea and run with it. MD **Elliot Myers** explains: "Ever since we announced the golf game and started showing people golf, we've had about five UK developers come to us wanting to use Gametrak for their golf game. Which is fantastic, but we already have a golf game. We don't need another golf game. But it's hard for them to take that leap of faith and imagine what it can be used for. So one of the things we have to do is make more demos just to show developers what can be done." It seems a rather demoralising comment on the state of UK development.

Nintendo, as ever, is far too gallant to comment on its struggles to get the wider development community to embrace its innovations. There's no question, however, that there have been next to no thirdparty titles which have successfully taken advantage of the GBA/GC link up. While *Animal Crossing* and *Four Swords Adventures* represent the high-water mark,



The Edge office is literally littered with devices that have affected how we play, one way or another. Tellingly, most needed dust scraped off them before this photo could be taken

PLAY MORE

EyeToy: Play 2, due for release in early November, does an impressive job of expanding on the first's potential. Rather than rejigging the splatting and wiping of the first game, it takes the basic mechanics and makes them into more of a game. Rather than three-minute endurance tests, games are broken up into levels, with mini-minigames and boss battles to break them up. There's also much more emphasis on delicacy and precision, as well as a Play Room which encourages you to cast spells with tomatoes.





Virtual bubblewrap

Although not short of ideas itself, Sony has avoided the problem of the uninspired developer by running a public 'Design a game for *Play 2*' competition. It was won by Christopher M Key, whose design document (above) demonstrated clear and creative ideas about game structure and progression which can be found in the finished product

the lazy menu screens of Square Enix's *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles* suggest a gloomy way forward for the DS's double-screen possibilities.

JOYPAD TROUBLE

What makes it so hard for the development community to grasp the potential of these devices? It's partly the fact that you can't bolt these kinds of features on to games developed around the joypad. "One of the first things we tried with EyeToy was a version of *Pong*," recalls Macdonald, "but it quickly became apparent that it was better and more fun with a controller. So that became an early rule: anything we do has to be a better experience using an EyeToy than a conventional joypad."

Holmwood suggests that too many people have been burned by poorly integrated peripherals before: "If you look around trade shows, you see people demonstrating devices which purport to 'enhance' existing games. The guys demoing them look great, because they're mimicking the moves of a character in *Virtua Fighter* – and to the untrained eye it looks like the device is putting their movements into the game when in fact it's the other way around." As a consequence, Gametrak has taken the bold decision to refuse Gametrak support to any game not specifically designed around the controller.

Holmwood also has another explanation for the failure of developers to embrace the EyeToy's potential: "Not naming any names, but when you speak to someone who's working with EyeToy they say: 'OK, imagine all the things you could do with this', and you get excited and they go: 'Well, you can't'. It's just a camera attached to a comparatively weak computer and working out what's happening in a video signal is bloody hard. It takes 60 to 70 per cent of the PS2's processing time just to analyse the difference between one frame and the next." Macdonald acknowledges the problem but points to the future: "There is an element of processing – the PS2 wasn't

esigned to handle this kind of thing. But in e future there would be dedicated rocessing power in the cameras and rchitecture in the console to support it." A o-off about PS3? He won't say either way.

Sony has tested EyeToy games where the camera is used to control an aspect of a normally presented game, and rejected them

But while we're on the technical hallenges, it's also important to recognise e pragmatic reason for ignoring this new ector of the market. There are 20million S2s out in people's homes and only three illion EyeToys. Who in their right mind ould target such a slender section of the arket? "There's no barrier to entry," rgues Macdonald. "We don't charge nything. Plus EyeToy has a very high rofile and there's not much competition." or Gametrak, its standing start means it has to avoid the installed-base issue altogether. "To begin with it's all about bundling. Every Gametrak game will be available bundled with a Gametrak device, so you're not aiming at Gametrak owners, you're aiming at PS2 owners," explains Holmwood. It's a logical approach, but even with the incredibly economical design of the device, it still brings the bundle in at just under £70. That's a lot to ask for something many will still see as a novelty.

'Novelty' is probably the cruellest word you can throw at all these devices. Most EyeToys, after that initially flurry, gathered quite a bit of dust. Gametrak's *Dark Wind* – a simple beat 'em up – is something you're far more likely to bring out to demo to friends than to while away an evening. Is it remotely realistic to think that these devices can ever move beyond curio status and become meaningful game platforms? "Absolutely," says Holmwood. "Absolutely not," says Macdonald. Interesting.

"You can't get carried away with the idea that a 'normal' game – the kind you spend hours with – is going to work with an EyeToy," warns Macdonald. "There might be a few Olympic atheletes out there who are up for it, but for the rest of us it just wouldn't be fun. It would just be too tiring." He's convinced that the camera will become more thoroughly integrated into the PlayStation experience – although he won't say a word about PSP plans – but not to become the centrepiece of traditional videogames. Sony has tested EyeToy games where the camera is used to control an aspect of a normally presented game, and rejected them. "Putting yourself in a game like that just wasn't fun," relates Macdonald. "It's not going to be the case where you could take – I don't know – *Prince Of Persia* and control it with the camera. It would be great for 15 minutes, but that's not a game designed to be played in 15-minute chunks. For us, the appeal of EyeToy is that everyone likes to see themselves on TV."

Holmwood has very different ideas: "Can Gametrak games be as compelling as joypad games? Absolutely. We're in the awkward situation of debuting with a fighting game, which is probably the most exhausting implementation of the technology. Gametrak can handle slow, gentle movements just as easily."

"And," interrupts Myers, "there's no reason you can't take the joypad into the game space and use it with the Gametrak. We could do an FPS which works with a lightgun – clip one cord to the gun and the other to your belt and you can integrate melee attacks and ducking and strafing." Gametrak also has a secret – an expansion port in the base which can handle input from 254 buttons or a full analogue signal. "We could put in an analogue mat which can detect weight distribution – perfect for a skiing game," suggests Lavache, "or an

SHOUTING OUT

Voice control may be the most thoroughly tested of the new input systems – from the frustrating *Hey You, Pikachu!* to the unnerving *Seaman*, voice control has evolved to the point where it can be the basis for an entire control mechanism (see the disappointing *LifeLine*, reviewed in E136) or a tiny but brilliant afterthought. Argonaut's decision to include voice control in *SWAT: Global Strike Team* allowed partners and parents with no interest in gaming to get involved, screaming 'DROP YOUR WEAPON!' down a headset with frightening gusto. Nintendo is once again leading the field, with *Mario Party 6* shipping with a microphone and Atlus' *Caduceus: Surgical Operation* for NDS requiring players to croon gently to their patients as they slice and dice.



SWAT: Global Strike Team

The DC's microphone

Konami's *LifeLine*

RF receiver for controls on the gloves. The only limit on the designer is imagination."

ONE STEP BEYOND

Whoever's future you find more plausible, there's no question that these devices represent one of the gaming industry's best routes for moving beyond games themselves. Macdonald is happy to state it baldly: "EyeToy is all about entertainment. It's not about games. The approach we're taking is about broadening the appeal of PS2 as a whole. It becomes about console owning not console gaming. Ray Maguire [senior vice president and managing director, SCEUK] said at the Edinburgh International Games Festival that we need to lose the word 'games' – he suggested it be renamed the Edinburgh International Interactive Entertainment Festival, and I think EyeToy is part of that. We've always seen it as having a number of pillars – as a communications device and a fitness device. Gaming is only one of those pillars."

Gametrak is much more aggressive about positioning the device as a gaming platform. However, there are as few limitations on its non-gaming potential as there are on its gaming possibilities. Lavache recounts how he used a spare day (and a laptop) in a Chinese hotel to mock up a Gametrak drum kit. The company is already looking at medical applications – perhaps using the device in a GP's surgery to monitor the range of mobility in arthritis sufferers. "We get calls every day," says Holmwood, "from film companies who are interested in using it as a way to control camera movements on set." The idea of moving beyond games is one that – rightly – strikes a cold chill into the heart of most gamers. But in between traditional gaming and the icy wastes of corporate functionality and training software lies the much more poorly defined territory of 'play'. Many EyeToy 'games' – both in the Art Studio section of Konami's *U-Move Super Sports* and in the Play Room of Sony's own *EyeToy: Play 2* – aren't so much games as playthings. Things you toy with rather than toys. It's a creative, expressive and unpressured environment, something which has the ability to expand gaming's appeal without undermining it.

It's this which is at the heart of the question of these new devices. Why should developers care? Why should publishers and manufacturers invest? Why should gamers give them a second glance in the shops? In all cases, the answer is the same: because these devices have the potential to make games gamier, and to make more people gamers.

The idea that the joypad is offputting is far from unfounded. For Nintendo, it's the central issue. "Do complex joypads put newcomers off gaming? Unfortunately, yes," says Minagawa. "Sophistication is welcome, but too much complication will simply exclude new players. One of the main themes of the DS is bringing all the people back to the same starting line again, whether they are veteran videogame players or those who have never played. It's the same opportunity the NES offered 20 years ago. There's no handicap because everyone is a beginner with the DS."

Macdonald agrees, but only up to a point: "EyeToy at the moment has an appeal for people who find the joypad a barrier. But in the future that isn't going to be an issue. This generation has grown up using a joypad, and that barrier is going to cease to be an issue. It's like the way there's a whole generation of people who've grown up able to touchtype."

But whether it's a long- or short-term problem, naturalistic input devices remain

TRACKSIDE

Gametrak was inspired when Myers found himself staring at a retractable washing line strung over a hotel bath. Initial prototypes were made of kitchen worktops and the company found it unsurprisingly hard to convince publishers to invest. Following *Dark Wind* (due on PC in early 2005) will be a remarkably effective golf game and an as-yet-unseen set of minigames. The current device is designed to be as cost effective as possible, but future iterations will include force feedback on the cords, adding weight to the device's repertoire of height, width and depth.



Gametrak prototype

Dark Wind, for PS2

The finished product

MERCURY RISING

Tilt sensors have always had a rather bad name in gaming. Now Archer McLean hopes to correct that with *Mercury*, a PSP puzzle game based on manoeuvring balls of fluid mercury around mazes, traps and enemies. There are still technological hurdles to leap, but the intention is to deliver the game with an extremely sensitive tilt detector. Early prototypes indicate how well the system works, and the mind-aching challenge of keeping blue and red globules apart so they don't mix into purple is pure game pleasure.

This photo shows the game running live on the screen of a PSP development kit



far the best solution for bringing new ople into gaming. "My mother is 80," ys Lavache. "She's partially sighted and a wheelchair and she sits there with her ates – after a couple of sweet sherries – d with a Gametrak and her one good eye e can punch seven bells out of the ople on screen. And she says: 'Oh, now an see why people play videogames!'"

EW PLAYERS, NEW GAMES?

if these devices can bring new gamers gaming, what will there be for them to ay? At a time when game design is tting bloated – in terms of cost, evelopment time and content – many nds are fixed on whether or not it's going be sustainable in the next generation. For acdonald, it's already clear that it's not:

"With 3D, everyone got caught up in the challenge of making these amazing worlds and forgot some of the fundamentals. We've concentrated for too long on these blockbusters that just become increasingly expensive and suck in talent – I'm not saying we shouldn't make games like that, but we can't all be making them. EyeToy lets you do something different – you don't have to be a multibillion-dollar corporation to make games for it." It's ironic, coming from a man who has just stated that EyeToy "isn't about games", but it's the truth. As well as the ego trip and the accessibility, part of EyeToy's appeal has been that it presents the kind of simple, one-more-go gaming that first captivated the world.

Holmwood is even more militant: "Games are supposed to be games, not 'cinematic experiences'. They should be about what you do, not about what you see on screen." For Minagawa, the DS is a manifesto: "We want it to change the way games are made. We don't want talented and capable game developers to spend most of their time coming up with complicated scenarios and highly detailed graphics. Mr Miyamoto is like Hayao Miyazaki [of Studio Ghibi], who revealed his sorrow over young animators in a newspaper report a couple of years ago by saying: 'They are good, and much better than we were ten years ago, but they are spending too much time drawing the details of the components of robots and the inside of a girl's skirt'. Miyamoto wants designers to come up with great new ideas."

For developers, too, these devices offer a return to a time when game design was simpler and job satisfaction was higher. "People here love working on EyeToy because you can make an individual contribution and see it on screen," says Macdonald. "Working on a big game like *The Getaway* – it has its own rewards – but on a day-to-day basis it's not so easy to point at the screen and say: 'I did that'." A conversation with gaming grandfather Archer MacLean, currently at work on the tilt-controlled *Mercury* (see 'Mercury rising'), paints the same picture – a studio where developers can imagine and implement a level in minutes instead of weeks.

All in all, it could be the rosiest future ever painted for gamers – happy developers working for economically secure studios on projects based on gaming fundamentals for a bigger, diversified gaming audience. Of course, the dream has floundered before. While *EyeToy: Play 2* (see 'Play more') stands every chance of renewing the device's shine, will anyone else run with it? Will Gametrak manage to move beyond curio status and deliver on its ambitious software promises? Will NDS's potential ever be properly exploited outside of Nintendo? Macdonald, cautious and confident as ever, has the final word: "For this generation, the input has been 99 per cent joypad. For the next generation the number won't be that high. How much lower, I don't know, but I think that that's a very safe bet."

Vill Gametrak manage to move beyond urio status? Will NDS's potential ever be roperly exploited outside of Nintendo?


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WORD PLAY

Gamers deal with graphics, audio and interactivity, but what about words? Is the writing on the wall for writing in games?

In the beginning was the word. And the word begat a phrase. And the phrase was 'Avoid Missing Ball For High Score'. Gaming's public relationship with words started here, and continues to this day. These first furtive fumblings produced the most lasting signifiers which define games in the public eye, and will continue to do so as long as the form continues to exist in its current state. Icons like Extra Life and High Score are as much a signifier of gaming as any of the corporate mascots.

This isn't an article about words in games in the past, but their continuing use today. Words remain among the more enigmatic and efficient tools available to a professional game designer, and certainly the most overlooked. And their efficiency cannot really be overlooked – both in terms of player and development time. "Language (and prose in particular) remains an important tool for game designers because it's malleable," notes **Sheldon Pacotti**, a writer on *Deus Ex* and now a game systems designer at Secret Level. "One sentence can go from the Bronze Age to 21st century Shanghai to the bridge of the Starship Enterprise. Imagine the development budget to represent that last sentence visually." The reverse is equally true – while with enough of a budget, through montage or other effects, you can duplicate much of what words can do, it eats up time. For any amount of given time with the player, words can present a greater flow of ideas. While each of these may lack the impact of a single image, the developer can send barrages of concepts to send the player reeling.

This has traditionally found its home in either

roleplaying games, adventures, or games hybridised with their tendencies. Consider the most extreme – and its fans would say artistically satisfying – example of what words can allow in recent times, Black Isle's *Planescape Torment*, which crammed 800,000 words into a relatively short, but impressively dense, RPG.

"We just thought that there was so much you could do with written description – facial expressions, motions of the hand, etc, that we didn't have the art resources to represent," remembers **Chris Avellone**, lead designer on *Planescape: Torment*, and now working on *Knights Of The Old Republic 2* over at Obsidian. "To do all the cinematics, animations, and movies to capture the memory sequences, companion expressions and other moments just would have been impossible."

Torment is also interesting in that most of the most important moments in the game only vividly appear in the text. To choose a memorable example, it's a game whose 'best' endings close with a conversation rather than the traditional open brawl with the end-of-game boss. That these conversation trees prove so memorable is a testament to its power. "I think written descriptions of moments allow the player's imagination to paint how the scene plays out – and fill in the gaps – and it ends up being stronger for it," considers Avellone. "The more you let the player bring to the experience, the better."

An interesting parallel is the first generation of 'talkie' graphic adventures which, while often



The original *Deus Ex* used a mass of text to add to the realism of the determinedly real-world environment. From item descriptions to general chat, words thrive

extremely commercially successful, were often at the receiving end of the typical complaints that book-to-film conversions face in the multiplex: that the characters simply didn't sound how people imagined them. Text happens inside the mind, and can therefore be more personal. Of course, if a game is dense enough in words, it's not as if there's even the option of full voice acting. *Torment*, like many other RPGs, only voiced the first line of a character and the important scenes. "It was just a practical decision – there were just too many words," remembers Avellone, "but I think many people would rather have heard the game rather than read it. Still, voice acting wouldn't have jived with the stage directions in the dialogue, which could have been jarring."

Revert to type

Words can also carry meaning by their mere presence. Take the presence of English words in Japanese games, even those which will never be shipped outside of that marketplace. "Japanese people see US English as having a very cool image," explains games analyst **Shida Hidekuni**. "From the very beginning of game development in Japan, the developers used the poor English they knew at the time to make their game sound cool to users." In other words, English text was used purely as an aesthetic iconic form. "Even if Japanese people don't

eak very good English, or not at all," continues lekuni, "they have a some kind of natural attraction t. So English is used in everything in Japan, metimes with not much sense and often mixed with panese. If you look at ordinary devices like fridges, buttons are written in English. Games are only t of this cultural phenomenon."

Words also have another subtle, indirect use. The dern world is, by its nature, packed full of them. u simply can't avoid words. When trying to model a rld, a way to add to the realism in a non-intrusive y is to include a selection of them. It's the technique t has been used to flesh out the more non-linear rlds of PC RPGs for time immemorial. Even if the yers don't read these background texts – and the jority of them really don't – their presence creates illusion of a more authentic world by implication. In the same way that even though, outside of *The Sims*, no one ever actually feels the need to use a toilet in games, their presence in a modern-day virtual office is required or the world would seem faulty. Even when they're not being read, words are being seen and can make up an important part of the conceptual scenery. "In *Torment*, we had to give the illusion that the player was surrounded by thousands of dimensions and planes, even though he was only travelling to two or three," notes Avellone. "And the item descriptions and stories NPCs told went a long way to making that more believable to the player."

"It's somewhat telling, though," says Pacotti ruefully, "that we need to make an argument for language at all. I agree completely that some game developers need to be convinced even of the value of words. What I'd like to see is a growing awareness that game design itself is words." Words exist in the superstructure of any gaming experience, and games are more than pure phenomenological reflex. "Good entertainment in any medium begins with words, which are the tools we use to organise thought," he notes. "But most game design proceeds in a very chock-a-block fashion. In such an environment, words are just another system or feature, when what we should be striving for is a game experience that doesn't segment easily into different components." Text is a tool, like any other available, and part of its charm is how it integrates and sublimates with all others. "How nice it is to play a game like *Civilization*, in which drama, strategy, text, and game mechanics all blend together seamlessly," Pacotti laments. "It's like reading Erasmus or Proust. Such experiences are all too rare these days."

/ORDS EXIST IN THE SUPERSTRUCTURE OF ANY ;AMING EXPERIENCE, AND GAMES ARE MORE HAN PURE PHENOMENOLOGICAL REFLEX



ghts Of The Old Republic 2 looks to follow its decessor in bringing a more PC-styled use of text console audience, in a suitably streamlined style

The write way

While words may be best understood in mainstream games in a holistic sense, as one of a game designer's many multimedia tools, there is one corner of the modern gaming scene in which it is dominant. This is the form which programmer **Graham Nelson** memorably described as "a narrative at war with a crossword puzzle". That is the interactive fiction – or IF – community. Or, as they were known in the '80s, text adventures.

In the commercial sense, the text adventure was dead as the '90s rolled in, with the mainstream concentrating on the full flowering of LucasArts' graphical adventures. However, like most forgotten genres, it created an underground cult of devotees collating on newsgroups. Prompted by complaints that all the good games were in the past, Nelson created a program called Inform, which allowed the creation of Infocom-style adventures. Since then, with the simultaneous growth in popularity of the web, hundreds of adventures of various sorts have been



A short IF reading list

With hundreds of games available, it's difficult to know where to start with IF. In an attempt to avoid such difficulties, these are a handful of relatively accessible base camps to start your explorations.

PHOTOPIA (ADAM CADRE)
A fractured narrative piece that takes its time to unwind, juxtaposing real-world encounters with a dreamy fantasy story. When it hits its emotional target, it takes off the top of your head.

SHADE (ANDREW PLOTKIN)
Kitchen-sink realism transforms into unresolved, lingering and disturbing psychodrama. Also consider the longer, puzzle-based *Spider And Fly*, based around flashbacks from an interrogation.

GALATEA (EMILY SHORT)
A conversation between an art critic (the player) and a living statue (the single, highly developed NPC). With dozens of endings, this is unique and literate. Consider also Short's later, relatively short romances *Pytho's Mask* and *Best Of Three*.

SHRAPNEL (ADAM CADRE)
More of a fragment, in every definition of the word, than a fully developed piece, this is still a memorable and brutally powerful work.

RAMESES (STEPHEN BOND)
Minimal in terms of player action, this uses forced inaction as a metaphor for teenage depression.

All games are available from the IF Archive (www.ifarchive.org). Links and reviews are available from Baf's IF Guide (wurb.com/if/). Most games will require a Z-Code interpreter to play, also available from the above. We recommend WinFrotz for Windows (www.cris.com/~Twist/WinFrotz/), but MacOS, Linux and PocketPC versions, among others, are also available.

made, with Inform's files now capable of being run on interpreters for every system from the Oric-1 to the Game Boy – and that's not even considering the other alternative IF creation systems. Yearly competitions – such as IF Comp and the XYZZY Awards – provide a forum for new games to debut and be discussed. It's very much a living community.

However, this is more interesting than simple retro nostalgia for OPENing DOORS with GREEN KEYS. Of all the underground gaming communities, IF is probably the most progressive. To a newcomer investigating it, it's a striking example of a gaming community virtually divorced from the mainstream, running in its own separate direction, facing its own problems. The technology is relatively stable, at least compared to the tsunami of 3D cards most games face, leaving the creators with questions of formalism, deconstructionism and finding answers to the ever-relevant 'What on earth can I do with this thing?'

"Having established conventions of form is freeing when it comes to content: because the author doesn't have to spend all his time teaching the player a new play style, he's free to cover some different and more surprising territory," says **Emily Short**, IF author of critically acclaimed games like *City Of Secrets*, *Galatea* and *Best Of Three*, "How can we play with (or against) the reader/player's expectations? How can we use the form to express new things that have never been handled before? It's possible for those sorts of things to read as self-indulgent, dull, or obscure, but at their best, such experiments can have very startling effects. Adam Cadre has written a few pieces of IF that, like a good piece of stage magic, draw you in and get you to participate in something you fully understand only at the end." To choose a relatively minor, but clever, example – and we suggest you skip to the next paragraph if you've already been convinced of the worth of this work and plan on downloading it yourself – in *9:05* you find yourself waking up in the bedroom, covered in mud. A phone rings. You answer it, and are told by a loud voice that you're late for work. What follows is a selection of normal morning tribulations as you get washed, ready and head to work. Only when you turn up in the office is it revealed that it wasn't actually your house, and you were a burglar who fell asleep in the job. The contextual cues are enough to fool you completely.

TO A NEWCOMER INVESTIGATING IT, IT'S A STRIKING EXAMPLE OF A GAMING COMMUNITY VIRTUALLY DIVORCED FROM THE MAINSTREAM

It's an exquisitely told short joke, but this sort of narrative trick has been used to examine a far broader range of emotions.

It's also possible to play through in a 15-minute break from work, which is another interesting trend in the community. Not all games are novel-sized epics, with short works – either as a polished narrative unit in themselves, or to explore some coding possibility to



While *Invisible War* lost much of the detailed text of its predecessor, it still used news broadcasts, chat and datacube information to create similar effects





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'lanescape Torment **uses language in lieu of graphical esources. To create even a fraction of the game's detail 1 3D would break even the largest development budget**

llow better future games – relatively commonplace. Equally, it's also a hard game to 'lose'. The IF games pread along the axis between the two poles of the orm, from the crossword puzzle to the narrative, with nere being some examples where you're dragged nrough the story, kicking and screaming. Even in the nost extreme cases, however, there's a uniqueness to s approach that make the even nominally interactive F compelling.

Where is the community going next? "The thing bout IF is that its creators can face whichever hallenges they want," believes Short. "There's no narketing department. IF tends to evolve because pecific people decide they want to try experimenting vith specific things that have never been done efore." She focuses on areas such as accessibility, lot branching – a difficult thing to do with a modern udget, but relatively trivial in non-intensive text – and etter characters. **Adam Cadre**, however, is more downbeat: "I imagine that it'll probably gradually die off again. I suspect that most everyone who would be inclined to take a crack at IF has already done so. I know a lot of people who wrote a game, often a well-received one, and that was pretty much it; they'd gotten it out of their system and had no inclination to write a second one."

Short is more optimistic on this point. "I really don't know how long the community will last," she states. "But there are still new people becoming interested in IF who have never tried it before; this is pretty evident from the newbie posts on the newsgroups."

Over in the mainstream, expectations are even lower. Will anyone go as far as *Torment* did in the future? "Probably not," opines Avellone. "I think a text-heavy game is a tough sell to any publisher now, and even so, most games coming up are focusing more on voice acting, which is probably better for the player. As an example, working on *KOTOR 2: The Sith Lords* requires that LucasArts and us here at Obsidian manage a great deal of voice recording, and while it doesn't have the freedom of text, I think it's pretty powerful to hear characters actually delivering the lines instead of reading them. It's just a *lot* of work."

So there's that question again: is the writing on the wall for writing? In the current industry model of Hollywood style games, some of text's traditional roles will continue to be usurped by speech. That is, the spoken word triumphing over the written one. However, in certain areas, either inside games as context or as underground games, they'll continue to work their special magic. After all, we're not bored of words yet. You're still reading a magazine about videogames, right?

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dge's review policy

y issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, d, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, re five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s g system is fair, progressive and balanced. An age game deserves an average mark – not, as many ve, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: llent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

dge's most played

ga Ages Vol 14: Alien Syndrome

(PS2) 3D Ages

with most Ages releases, it's an imperfect remake, t adding *Robotron*-style dual stick control to the nillar relentless splatter makes for twoplayer hysteria.



lo

(Xbox) Microsoft

e frustrations of *Killzone*'s teething troubles (see has) sent us scurrying back. An hour of enraptured op later its still clear that nothing comes close.



eakdown

(Xbox) Namco

othing else – and, unfortunately, there *is* practically hing else – it's a rare game that you'll play through ply for the promise of what it could have been.



rnout 3

(PS2, Xbox) Electronic Arts

ely has so much fun been had with one joypad d eight hangovers. *Burnout*'s Party Crash is very d to beat for a post-post-pub gaming comedown.



Role Britannia

Home-grown RPGs are still waiting for a hero

Like the Scottish Play, the British RPG has an attendant sense of foreboding. Time and again hopes are raised, only to be dashed. From grand chrysalises of high concepts emerge bewildered, bedraggled butterflies – *Silver*, *Soulbringer*, *Sudeki*. Others aren't lucky enough to survive their growing (and contracting) pains, as evidenced by the abandoned worlds of *Warhammer Online* and *Dragon Empires*. And now, after 12 years of planning and five years of hype, we have *Fable* (below).

For all its merits, *Fable* isn't the Great British RPG to break the curse. Not because it isn't great, not because it's not British, but because it's not really an RPG. Instead, it's something peculiarly brilliant in its own right: an action game where character customisation is controlled through your actions, not through a forest of menus. There are RPG elements, of course, EXP to spend and spells to upgrade, but this isn't a game about becoming who you want to be.

Almost all of what was promised – the moral depth, the infinitesimal detail and the boundless freedom – has been jettisoned. We're left with the vestiges – a story which relies on timeworn cliché and amateur dramatics as heavily as it parodies them; a pantomime morality which shapes how others see you instead of how you see yourself. The review that follows will show you why that's a much better thing than it may seem.

It leaves us, however, with the question of the GBRPG, to coin a torturous new acronym. Why has it proved so hard for us to stamp our identity on such an enduring genre, to stake our claim in the annals among the *Final Fantasies*, *Ultimas* and gold box D&D titles? It's not that we lack the heritage: ours is choked with myth, whether historical or in the stories of Tolkien, Peake, Barker, Harrison, Pullman and more. Nor do we lack the talent or vision to create a game as epic, or intimate, as any fondly remembered US or Japanese title.

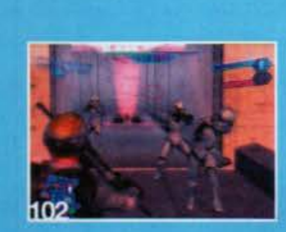
Perhaps it's a question of faith: that something as wicked and strange as a great British original could be accepted in a genre that, historically, doesn't react well to surprises. Under pressure to conform to conflicting definitions, our best-intended RPGs have been hammered out of shape. Even if it's not what was expected, *Fable* at least still flies true.













Fable

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Lionhead/Big Blue Box** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now (US), October 8 (UK)**





Stealth is *Fable*'s weakest aspect. An eyeball icon in the top right of the screen displays the number of people who may be able to see you





And so, the last of Xbox's launch promises finally touches down. Gliding on a thermal of continuous hype, *Fable* has travelled a mighty arc of untold ambition and astronomical possibility, but the actuality of the game is fittingly grounded. When a game has had such an epic build-up, it's hard not to expect it to be anything but a sprawling non-event, but that is one expectation that has been confounded: *Fable* doesn't sprawl, it doesn't overreach and it's not a non-event.

Fable is not a different game every time you play. In fact, it's exactly the same adventure every time you play. It's you that changes

It isn't, as the cynics would have it, a Molyneux 'em up. It's not work masquerading as play, and it doesn't try to confuse adventuring with accountancy. It's not a different game every time you play. In fact, it's exactly the same adventure every time you play. It's you that changes.

Fable's main quest is brief, in terms of both play time and plot detail, and it's refreshingly curt with it. This main quest can be completed in less than ten hours, and its second half feels lacklustre in terms of objectives, if not in terms of characters and settings. It's hugely reliant on combat, as are a majority of the side quests, meaning that despite the brevity it can feel like a trudge at times, a fact not helped by a frustrating token stealth section and many escort missions that inevitably reduce the action and progress to an inhibited series of baby steps. It's not actually possible to fail a quest in *Fable*; the game tops and tails each objective with an autosave. If you fail, you can reload and choose either to retake it or not take it at all. It's indicative of *Fable*'s surprisingly streamlined, focused and honed structure: your inventory doesn't burden you, and bows come with infinite arrows. It's a game filled with many welcome concessions to the realities of a slick videogame experience.

Thankfully, though, *Fable*'s combat is one of its strengths, making the game feel as much a thirdperson action game as anything else. There's some dullness to it, sure, but that comes from the quantity, not the quality. The combat control system, like the HUD itself, is initially bewildering but soon reveals itself to be a mostly reliable, concrete set-up, facilitating the swift use of magic, physical attacks and dodging in a responsive and satisfying manner. There's a problem, though in that your lock-on can often break without you realising, with your targeted enemy remaining highlighted. Plus, you've often the need to flick the right thumbstick in order to assign a new target while holding down at least one of the triggers and maybe even a face button; gamers with the dexterity to nudge the stick with their right thumb will be





People in *Fable* give off a useful coloured glow. Those tinged green have something pertinent to say or offer, blue represents a bog-standard NPC and red indicates who you're locked on to









Each tavern is home to its own tabletop minigame, such as the excellent coin golf, a variation of shove ha'penny with an obstacle course of jugs and mugs to put you off

…st able to make use of it, deploying what is …olished but flawed system to its deft best. You can cherry-pick your way through … three major combat disciplines on offer – …lee weapons, ranged weapons and magic …ut there is a tendency to lean on your …ged weapon as it offers a perhaps …-tempting compromise between the …wer of melee weapons and the distanced …ety of magic attacks, and makes every …ss encounter a pushover. In fact, *Fable* … game that's perhaps too easy, especially … anyone who dabbles in building …perience via side-questing, but it's a fact …t's offset slightly by the quality of the …aracter-based experience and the …urious production values.

And so it's on to the game world itself, a place where you occupy or indulge yourself in between missions to further increase your wealth, inventory or renown. Fancy buying or renting a home? Marriage? Sex? Divorce? Alcoholism? Stealing? Flipping your middle finger at small children? They're all possible, albeit in a limited but entertaining fashion that has little impact on the main quest but everything to do with your appearance and fame. It's not so much a game with depth as one with width, a fat pool of possible ways for you to idle away your time between quests, allowing you to craft what feels like an unprecedented sense of social personality, in terms of colour and grandeur if not actual complexity.

Morality in *Fable* is a means to an end. It's not a vessel through which your adventure is defined, it's a powerful tool for character crafting, but it's of little overall consequence. *Fable*'s moral barometer isn't so much a litmus test as a chemistry set, a virtual make-up bag with which you design your in-game self. Your lavish hero is the centrepiece of the experience, possibly more so than ever in a videogame, with your actions having vivid, exaggerated visual consequences for him. Eating a baby chick, sporting a shocking facial tattoo or making the conscious decision to pursue a meat-rich diet all dictate how your avatar morphs and changes with time. Sneering at passers by, or pulling a sexy muscle pose for the ladies, are



Traders, like all of *Fable*'s generic population, will respawn soon after being killed. You can establish a trade route for extra money, too, if you like





Demon Doors are dotted around *Fable*'s countryside. The gargoyles voice (sometimes lateral) conditions needed to make them open, allowing you to plunder the treasures within









Labour party

Fable raids the RPG tool shed to add a new layer to its world, giving the player access to a fishing rod and a spade. Both can be found early on in the game, but are readily provided when the main quest demands them. Digging feels pointless, and is acted out via mini cut-scenes; it only really comes in useful when given specific information as to the location of buried treasure. Fishing is a little more engaging, using simple button-tapping to land whatever bites. But it's a little misleading, as you seem as likely to land a power-up or a silver key as a snack.

similarly entertaining enterprises, albeit ones with no overarching consequence for your quest. It just changes how you look, and what people think of you. It's about whether you want to be thought of as an ass or a badass, whether you want be followed by flies or butterflies. It doesn't allow you to carve a brave new path through the game world. However, running around a town with a trophy held aloft in order to impress a gaggle of villagers is a genuinely amusing distraction, a caricature of celebrity that maybe helps explain away *Fable*'s 'Project Ego' codename.

The morality can also be confusing and incoherent, and rarely proffers the multiple-choice karma of *KOTOR*. Killing a bandit, even if in cold, idle bloodlust, is seen as a 'good' deed, whereas accidentally hitting an ally in battle is seen as a wanton and premeditated burst of evil. But this lack of definition is offset by the glorious simplicity of it all; it's in choices so obvious – save the endangered traders or murder them; aid the bandits in a subquest or fight them – that you can still follow your heavenly/devilish persuasion without having to tiptoe around finer details and consequences.

Fable has a style that's been allowed to flourish far beyond the token variety of the generic – it's mature, moody and just plain magnificent

It's all framed by a world that, visually, is both dazzlingly beautiful and strikingly coherent. By refusing to let the environments venture far from the overarching theme of thick forestry and rural settlements, *Fable* has a style that's been allowed to flourish far beyond the token variety of the generic – it's mature, moody and just plain magnificent. *Sudeki* perhaps pips it in terms of scale, but definitely not in terms of unified, unfaltering prettiness. This is a game that's been injected with art and detail throughout the entirety of its overlong conception, and it shows it at every step, marred only by the occasionally sluggish framerate and twitchy character movements during cut-scenes. The soundtrack is similarly excellent, typically orchestral but always falling the right side of twee, dramatic, calm or grandiose as needs be. Voice acting takes in a range of British accents; some are typically hammy, awful videogame strains, while others – those of a more mocking tone – are quite likeable.

But those soundbites spouted by NPCs are a double-edged sword. When chatting to a handful of villagers, the dialogue swiftly grates into repetition, but the chagrin is softened somewhat by the fact that you rarely actually need to talk to them; just pose, posture and make your presence known. The level of soundbite diarrhoea, however, is at its most potent when forming the backdrop for your travels. Hearing a round of applause and cheers as you run through a village is a genuinely charming event, emphasised brilliantly by the flamboyant appearance of your character. However, there are infuriating lines of advisory dialogue that kick in every single time your energy or mana is low; they're not an aid, but an invasion, especially since they cut into any other dialogue being spoken at the time. If you're a heavy magic user, it becomes just infuriating to have to hear the same "Hero, your magic is low! Watch that" warning several times during every battle. And, no, it can't be switched off, inexplicably.

Fable, however much it's talked about, isn't the stuff of legend. But it has turned out to be an affecting game, with an articulate combat system and a character development culture quite unlike any other. It doesn't redefine the roleplaying game, but it does redefine the act of roleplay, turning it into a tangible and enjoyable pantomime. *Fable* only fulfils a fragment of the puffed-up hyperbole that's accompanied it since conception. And for that, it seems, we should be thankful.

Edge rating: Eight out of te

OutRun 2

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **AM2/Sumo** Price: **£40** Release: **October 1**







Anyone with an evil streak and time to burn may want to try running over the flag-waving marshal at the start line

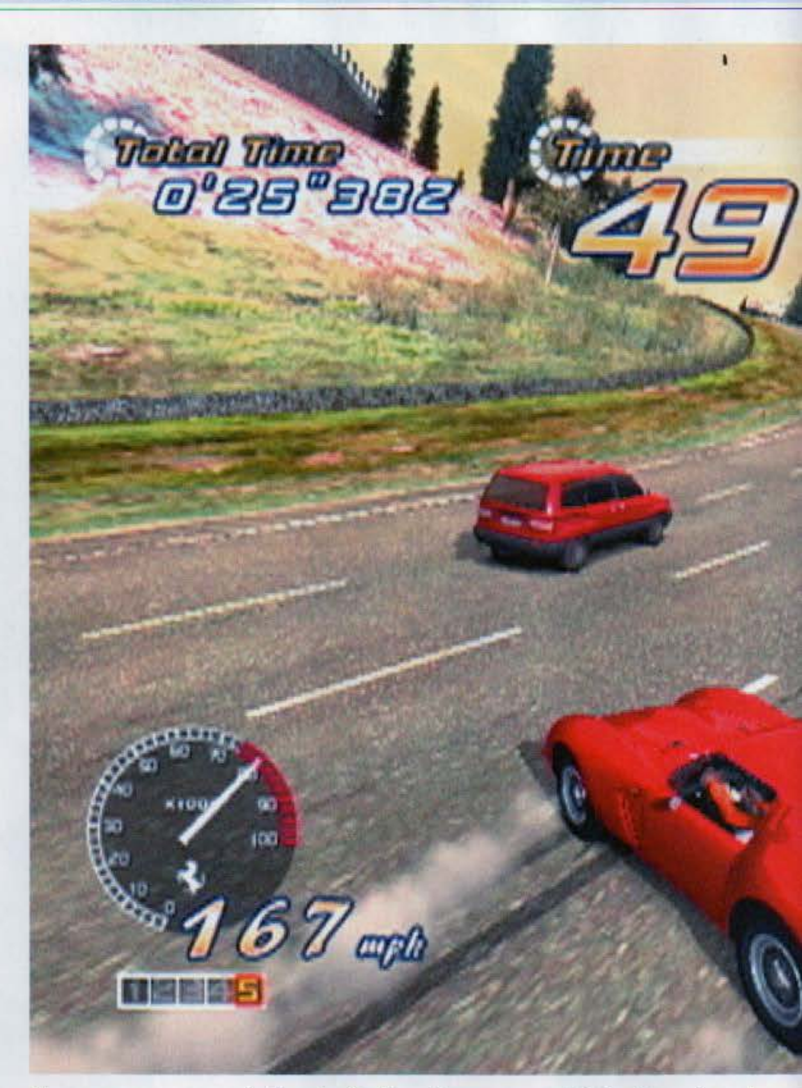
It's a testament to the strength of the classic *OutRun* tunes that the new music tracks in the sequel just aren't up to scratch. Thankfully, the originals of Splash Wave et al are unlockable

Driving games, as a genre, may be as oversubscribed as the cliché goes, but they're becoming harder and harder to pin down. Into just what kind of pigeonhole does *Burnout 3*'s turbo orgy of destruction fit? Third/firstperson risk-based action combat racer? Interactive snuff porn for metallurgists? There's no longer any pigeonhole, bar the one it's carved for itself. Modern driving games carry personality beyond genre, possibly thanks to the need to stand out from the crowd. And so it is to *OutRun 2*, which is as much a driving game as *Ikaruga* is a shoot 'em up; it is, of course, but that definition alone does the game weak justice. *OutRun 2* is Sega at its best – uncompromising, disciplined and coolly brilliant – as much as it was when the original *OutRun* seduced a generation of gamers.

OutRun 2 is manna for powerslide fetishists. It's built around a simple, but effective, idea – the ability to perform supernaturally long and severe powerslides with little loss of speed. In Ferraris. Around supernaturally long and severe bends. In Ferraris. It's not so much a one-note mechanic, though, as a one-inch punch of game design – snappy and compact, and the better for it.

OutRun 2's arcade mode is represented by a fine conversion from UK devco Sumo, with gleaming roadside detail that's pretty enough to impress but repetitive enough to never cause too much of a distraction. The Heart Attack mode lends the game's diverging 15-track structure another burst of life, as players amass love hearts by performing tasks dictated by the (surprisingly aggressive) female passenger. *OutRun 2*'s main mode is deceptively subtle, packing a lot of slight strategy into what first appear to be shallow, pointlessly overblown and brutally unrefined powerslides. A gentle tug on the brake is enough to send your vehicle into a sweeping skid that, through judicious steering, can be used to change lanes or clip the apex while your car is nearly side on to the screen. That subtlety can be hard to detect and direct, but it's brought home deftly by OutRun Challenge Mode, a cavernous series of mini-missions and tasks.

OutRun 2 is manna for powerslide fetishists, built around the ability to perform supernaturally long and severe powerslides with little loss of speed



There are some corners you just *have* to slide through to overcome, reinforcing the precise and pristine nature of *OutRun 2*'s sliding mechanic, which allows ludicrous skids without slowing down

The challenges themselves, at least initially, are excellent. Imaginative without feeling like novelties, and challenging without feeling cheap, they're built around the game instead of being mindlessly dropped in. One style of challenge has you taking bends at the optimum angle at which to photograph nearby giant heart balloons. Other fiendish missions require the player to multitask heavily, memorising a series of fruits or perform arithmetic as they drive; it's these mind-tearing challenges that prove some of the more compulsive as your aching synapses refuse to be beaten by what is the videogame equivalent of rubbing your stomach while patting your head. Even the less outrageous challenges prove consuming as you find yourself eager for a new excuse to squeeze out ever more graceful slides. The reward structure and the sheer proliferation of bonuses – new cars, tunes, reverse tracks and even whole multi-part special stages based on certain other Sega racing games – only add to the initial addiction.

The latter stages of the mission mode do grate, however. They're just coarse elongations of earlier tasks, and they can become crushingly hard, with a single mistake forcing a restart and minutes of play to be wasted. And it means that, while Sumo

Previously in E127, E130, E137











The game's frontend is a magnificently unfussy and refreshing mix of soft blue sky and palm tree silhouettes, accompanied by the calming sound of gently lapping waves





s made a valiant attempt at extending the gevity of the game, it can only postpone feeling of limitation for so long; *OutRun 2* athes ample life into a single idea and the sion mode takes it to its logical nclusion, but the feeling of repetition during ended play is inevitable. The harsh criteria progression doesn't help matters: grades y from A to E, with AA and AAA available masterful performances – but the nimum grade required to pass a stage is A. ject *Gotham Racing 2*'s flexible difficulty gradient, where skill is rewarded but lack of it isn't punished, would be far more welcome. The frustration isn't helped, either, by the sensation of persecution that results from the player seemingly left worse off for any collision with a rival, regardless of whether you're ramming or being rammed.

Still, *OutRun 2*'s heady caricature of driving is some kind of high-water mark for how much beautifully slick, instantly fluid and, thanks to the excellent use of joypad rumble, gloriously tangible play can be squeezed into five minutes of flamboyant autoerotica. The only thing it's bothered with simulating is uninhibited and gratifying videogaming, even though it's a thrill whose long-term hooks are limited to high-score whittling. Regardless of genre or pigeonhole, *OutRun 2* is in excellent company, comparable to anything offered by the best of the *Ridge Racer* series and, fittingly, any of Sega's most memorable racing games.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Ghost musters

While *OutRun 2* supports online play over its arcade and bonus tracks for a total of eight players (with the leader deciding the route when at a junction), it's the ability to download and race ghosts of other players that proves massively compelling. And understandably so, since it mixes the concentrated precision of solo play with the ever-increasing standards of rival players.

Phantom Brave

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Nippon Ichi Software** Developer: **Nippon Ichi** Price: **$45** Release: **Out Now (US), TBC (UK)**





Phantoms will stay active in a fight only for a limited time: deciding when and where to summon your party during a battle is paramount to success



As you would expect from Nippon Ichi, the game encourages you to explore the third dimension. Items and characters can be stacked and thrown, crucial for accessing distant areas of larger levels





With *Disgaea* and *La Pucelle Tactics*, Nippon Ichi etched its name on the videogaming map with the boldness of a codeshop fully aware of its mastery and innovation. The tiny Japanese outfit is now at the bleeding edge of strategy RPG craft, hurriedly breathing life into a genre otherwise left as a cadaver for the dissection of history and handhelds. If *La Pucelle* provided an in-road for the newcomer and *Disgaea* was the hyperbolised realisation of all the genre's chess-like complexities, then *Phantom Brave* is Nippon Ichi's reworking of the wheel.

It's difficult not to keep referencing the company's former games when examining *Phantom Brave*, as the audiovisual framework is identical, the 2D sprites, larger-than-life anime characterisation, isometric viewpoint and tinkling melodies all interchangeable with those of its precedents.

Similarly, the same spiritual world provides this game's premise as we follow exploits of Marona, a squeaking, asinine young orphan who is fostered by her dead parents' phantom friend, Ash. Marona is a Chroma, one who can see and control phantoms. As a result of her gift she has been ostracised to Phantom Island where she receives a mixture of hate mail and offers of freelance work.

Despite these superficial similarities, *Phantom Brave* is technical step forward for the genre. It seems the entire development budget has been spent on brainy mechanics, squeezing a new play engine into an otherwise old, comfortable chassis and creatively and radically reworking the elements that made the earlier games successful.

Marona's party is entirely made up of ethereal phantoms. When she arrives on a battlefield she must build her party by summoning the phantoms and confining them to any of the countless objects littering the battlefield. Confinement essentially translates as turning an item into the physical representation of the phantom so they can participate in the combat at hand.

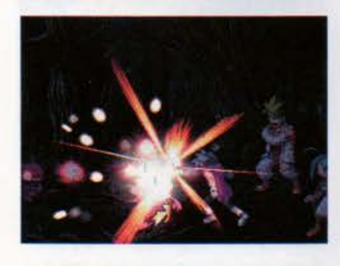
Different objects provide different base statistic modifiers to the phantom you choose to assign. Some are positive and some negative, depending on the type of object the phantom possesses. For example, confining a phantom to a rock will vastly boost their defensive properties but decrease attack, making rocks a good choice for a healer. This, coupled with the fact your phantoms can only remain on the field for a limited time (forcing you to strategise temporally as well as geographically), becomes the game's major subversion: each time you summon your party their basic strengths and weaknesses shift.

To complicate things further, objects that can be confined may also be wielded as weapons. Doing so grants a set of different abilities to the wielder, which may be completely different to the stats gained if you were to inhabit the object. Therefore the rock that granted good defence when confined may instead greatly boost your attack if you choose to lift it as a weapon.

If you're feeling confused now, then peeling away the further onion layers will really make your eyes water: objects and characters on the playfield may be sending their own modifiers to other characters or objects or, of course, receiving them, rather like the prism system in *Disgaea*. Any object on the field may be simultaneously giving and receiving modifiers, and a skilled player can use this against the enemy: it's the key to a swift victory and generous bonuses.

However, as the number of enemies on the field increases, the lack of a grid system means the screen can quickly become confusingly overloaded. The absence of the grid means that placing characters





If Disgaea was a hyperbolised realisation of the genre's chess-like complexities, then Phantom Brave is Nippon Ichi's reworking of the wheel













On slippery terrain it's easier to knock people off the edge. It's a cheap kill, and the game responds by levelling up all remaining enemies

ropriately for an attack requires tight cision and may force the player to reset r moves two or three times. This is e-consuming and ultimately frustrating, as freedom the developer intended instead comes a niggling bind.

Off the battlefield, things follow a more ditional path. The money you earn must chase weapons and new phantoms, up a combined active limit of 50. Rarely do nes lean so heavily on the player's lligence and forward planning to enable gress. Similarly, rarely do games force the er to put in the extra levelling-up time uired to progress in *Phantom Brave*. The er must consistently work through dom dungeons (see 'Phantom in the ra'), as often the party simply hasn't got enough HP to contend with the main chapters. This is something *Disgaea* never forced upon a player, and the difficulty curve is perhaps the worst offender in removing raw fun from the game.

As a consequence, unless you're a die-hard, head-down strategist, you'll be looking to the storyline to inspire you to put in all that extra time. Unfortunately, *Phantom Brave*'s yarn is too slight and is painted in primary colours. Neither the conception nor the telling warrant playing the game for its cut-scenes.

The mind-bending subversion of all the genre staples is commendable, and Nippon Ichi's disregard for the cult of stagnated updates is at once exhilarating and unnerving. It's exhilarating because it leaves the player wondering exactly where these craftsmen of the strategy minutiae will go next, and it's unnerving because *Phantom Brave*'s reworking is a bridge too far for all but the most dedicated of videogame strategists.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten



Phantom in the opera

Phantom Brave fully charges you with the task of creating and defining your own party. The more you spend on creating a phantom, the better its base stats. As you defeat new enemies in the main game, so their classes become available for creation in your party. Phantom classes are much wider ranging than just those useful in battle. The dungeon monk phantom, for example, creates random dungeons.

Star Wars Battlefront

Format: **PS2 (version tested), Xbox, PC** Publisher: **LucasArts** Developer: **Pandemic Studios** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

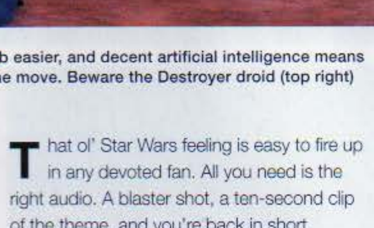


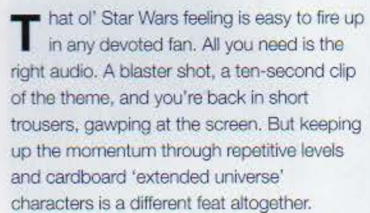






Ordering other troops around you makes your job easier, and decent artificial intelligence means computer-controlled characters are always on the move. Beware the Destroyer droid (top right)





That ol' Star Wars feeling is easy to fire up in any devoted fan. All you need is the right audio. A blaster shot, a ten-second clip of the theme, and you're back in short trousers, gawping at the screen. But keeping up the momentum through repetitive levels and cardboard 'extended universe' characters is a different feat altogether.

With *Star Wars Battlefront*, LucasArts makes good on its very public promise to provide only top-quality gaming for the franchise. This is no gritty reimagining of the saga a la *Republic Commando*, nor is it a simplistic grab-bag of Star Wars 'moments', although they're in here too. Instead, *Battlefront* recreates almost every land battle from all six films, with the player taking on the role of a trooper from the rebel, clone, droid or imperial armies. And in spite (or perhaps because) of the lack of story, it also offers the most authentic, romantic Star Wars experience since that first well-loved arcade cabinet way back in '83. (Cutely, *Battlefront*'s frontend menus are stripped down and vectorised in much the same way.)



As you'd expect, the many vehicles on offer deliver varied experiences. You'll learn to love some and avoid others

Los Angeles studio Pandemic had a tightrope walk between delivering gameplay and staying true to the Star Wars world. And it's pulled off the near-perfect balancing act between the familiar form and robust gameplay function. For once, we can play a Star Wars game in which very few gaps have had to be filled. Everything does just what it's meant to: all vehicles can be piloted, from speeder bikes to giant assault units, and the waves of soldiers give the impression of large-scale battles. Obvious concessions to online fighting are commendably few. (Health and ammo boosts are handled by familiar droids scattered around the battlefield, so even powering up doesn't feel too forced.)

Aerial craft are one casualty of the balancing process, with snail-like reloading speeds and ponderous controls. But, just like every other aspect of *Battlefront*, when used at the right time and place they can change the course of a battle. You can almost feel the months of playtesting that whipped the game into its finished state. Not bad, considering Lucas never had to worry about balancing forces when he set his ragtag rebels against the Empire's industrial might.

Offline, the robust controls and a constant level of action mean singleplayer mode isn't the write-off it is in many online games – including the main inspiration here, *Battlefield 1942*. In fact, playing alone feels like a demented, squad-based version of a traditional shooter, albeit with an over-the-shoulder or thirdperson view. Endless respawns help you grab waypoints for ultimate victory, and a Risk-like Galactic Conquest mode satisfactorily fills out the action. But it's online where the game really shines, with vehicles encouraging team play and the differing soldier types coming into their own. Choosing to be a pilot or sniper rather than a heavy weapons expert or ordinary trooper makes so much more sense with real-life teammates by your side.

The battle for Hoth stands out as a classic example of gameplay. The dodgy

With Star Wars Battlefront, LucasArts makes good on its very public promise to provide only top-quality gaming for the franchise

Previously in **E**134, **E**138











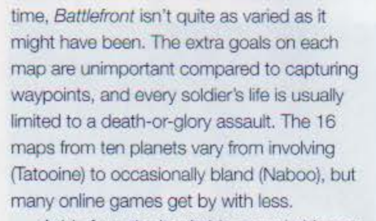


Big guns are essential for taking on vehicles, but every character has a secondary weapon for more general fire, and most carry grenades



op-motion animation on a loping Tauntaun rue to the original movie, but the animals also an indispensable way of getting ross the tundra. AT-ATs keep their spidery, phantine stomp, but they're not quite the ttle-ending beasts you might imagine, and en the lacklustre droid army from The antom Menace feels suitably beefy. On the her hand, the squawking Gungans and voks are just asking to be taken out.

While the arenas subtly suggest combat rratives which play out differently every



time, *Battlefront* isn't quite as varied as it might have been. The extra goals on each map are unimportant compared to capturing waypoints, and every soldier's life is usually limited to a death-or-glory assault. The 16 maps from ten planets vary from involving (Tatooine) to occasionally bland (Naboo), but many online games get by with less.

Aside from the inevitable sequel, this may well be the last great Star Wars game. Online PS2 players are certainly likely to be seduced away from the underwhelming *SOCOM II*, and Xbox owners will embrace an alternative to *Halo*. Those accustomed to the adult world of online PC gaming may have reason to sniff at the more streamlined play, but Pandemic has given consoles a whole new genre, pretty much perfectly formed. But then maybe there's a simpler reason for *Battlefront*'s immediate appeal – no game has ever felt quite so much like playing with Star Wars figures.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Dark side rising

In Galactic Conquest mode, every planet conquered brings a new advantage into play, from improved aiming to enemy radar spamming. An automatic favourite is Jedi Hero, bringing the game's only Force-using characters on screen in the form of Count Dooku, Luke Skywalker and his bad dad. The Jedi may be the showiest fighters, but every character boasts accomplished animation – another example of the graphical thoroughness that adds considerably to *Battlefront*'s charm.

Evil Genius

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Vivendi** Developer: **Elixir Studios** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**135







Evil Genius' visuals are clean and consistent, but not as charming as something like *The Sims*. The '60s spy movie presentation is packed with humour and ironic asides







While the genius is little more than a figurehead, minions receive stat bonuses from the presence of their master. Tired lackeys lacking motivation can be quickly fixed by a meandering boss



After the unusual and expensive misfire of creativity that was *Republic: The Revolution*, it's heartening to see that Elixir's second game strikes a better balance of accessibility, creativity and entertainment. *Evil Genius* is the kind of management title that should be bread and butter for PC gaming.

This is *Dungeon Keeper* with a broader vision. The evil genius in question is one of three Bond-style supervillains who must manage their underground lair while struggling to achieve world domination through crime campaigns and, ultimately, the use and abuse of various doomsday devices. The action is divided between these two tasks, with the base-building being managed in a top-down 3D map and the world-ransoming being handled on a simplified global overview.

Progress is near perfect in its escalation of reward and complexity. There's a steady influx of new toys to play with and new enemies to send to their deaths amid blaring emergency sirens. The island base is under constant siege from the forces of justice, and balancing security with nefarious deeds becomes a keen challenge. Skilled henchmen help ease the burden, while your minions are as stupid as in Hollywood and must be carefully manipulated, or even maliciously executed, to ensure the smooth running of the base.

But there are problems: there's no real interest to be had in the acts of infamy you must undertake, and the tacked-on hotel-building cover plot is flaccid. This latter feature seems unnecessary and clumsily implemented, like an idea too far. A larger crime, perhaps, is that the actual personae of the geniuses are neglected and they're never given room to be involved in the action or even sit back and gloat. Less an evil genius, more an alienated manager. Worse, there are balancing problems, including staggeringly frustrating attacks which seem to render your clever security pointless. Nevertheless, the video-driven tutorials and help menu systems are pleasingly straightforward. Most actions that aren't explained are so intuitive as to be no trouble at all, and the interaction with base and minions only occasionally frustrates.

While there are awkward moments on this malignant management escapade, it's never less than charming. The exaggerated '60s spy-movie design is familiar and entertainingly fresh, and although flawed, it's still far more appealing than *Republic*. It seems likely to put Elixir on the road to better things.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Tag, you're dead

Intruders on the island have, by default, a neutral status. Minions and henchmen will ignore them unless directly attacked or ordered to intervene by the use of tags. These might order them to weaken a character, to capture them or perhaps dispatch them entirely. Occasionally it will be necessary to completely ignore intruders so that they can be used to unwittingly aid the genius in his nefarious plans.

Rocky Legends

ormat: **PS2, Xbox (version tested)** Publisher: **Ubisoft** Developer: **Venom Games** Price: **£40** Release: **October 1**

▪ his is, in effect, what happens when game sequels and movie sequels collide. aracters are fleshed out by more elaborate reer modes, and the bad guys become the od guys by becoming playable.

The *Legends* tag refers to a career mode at's no longer dedicated solely to Balboa's gs-to-riches ascent, but encompasses the uggles of all the most notorious Rocky ring en: Drago, Creed and Lang, each with their vn trajectories, regimes and humble ginnings. The frippery of this revisiting of ocky's greatest hits isn't impressive, though, cut-scenes are poor and the voice acting is convincing to the point of hammy comedy.

The heart of the game is largely changed. The camera has panned slightly ick from the boxers, meaning that fights se a little of that carrot-snap brutality that ade the original feel like such a brassy allop of a gloves-off beat 'em up rather than boxing game. Straight body blows seem to ve been shortened and weakened, but oks to the gut are still as stinging and oblematic as ever. Super punches can, after e successful landing of several clean hits, be oled into a ferocious and deadly combo. so, players on the receiving end of a mmelling can push their opponent away, at e cost of stamina. None of this feels like finement, however, just a slight bulking up.

This is still a consuming, flowing and arky fighting game that, like Rocky himself, as defiant as it is aged. With *Legends*, u're buying into an upgraded suite of esentation – of lengthy career modes, of yet ore movie-faithful music – than anything se. It's a bulging DVD special edition next to e VHS functionality of the original, but, noyingly, it's a DVD that forces you to lock all of its special features.

This is the game's greatest shame – that it sists on that hollow value of keeping all the ultiplayer goodies (stages and boxers) cked away until the player has jumped rough enough hoops in the career mode to rchase them, punishing those who want to dulge in the still-excellent twoplayer fisticuffs r not having played solo. It smacks of trying draw out the dying moments of a well-gged horse. With *Knockout Kings*' recent plementation of a gutsy and cathartic alogue control scheme, this is perhaps the st time Rocky should strut his stuff before timely retirement. But then that's obably what they said about Rocky II.

dge rating: Six out of ten











Authenticity of licence is part of *Rocky Legends*' appeal, but the outrageously bad voice acting attached to some of the more infamous characters doesn't help matters any





More classic Rocky tunes feature in *Legends*; there's even an excellently timed fade-in of Gonna Fly Now as your opponent comes close to defeat. The need to unlock bonus content remains a problem



Lord of the wings

Bag yourself over $150,000 in the career mode and you can unlock the Chicken Chase training, a bonus stage that sees Stallone grasping at greasy fowl while trainer Mickey rasps advice from the sidelines. It's one of the best unlockables in the game, albeit one that doesn't offer much depth. Save-hen out of ten?

Juiced

Format: **PC, PS2, Xbox (version tested)** Publisher: **TBC** Developer: **Juice Games** Price: **£40** Release: **TBC**

Previously in **E**132, **E**138











Showoff rounds allow you to perform for the delight of the crowd. Online multiplayer (not tested) is promised for the retail version



A sense of belonging

The game's strongest point, other than successfully delivering a comprehensive and engaging tuning shop, is the sense of community it attempts to instill. Rival racers aren't simply faceless competitors, and the ability to build your own crew (there are team events in which to participate) are fresh additions. True, the racing itself is quite soulless, but perhaps it'd be argued that that's not necessarily the game's focus.



Much thought has clearly gone into *Juiced*, but there is a notable lack of general polish all round, and the menu progression is unnecessarily convoluted and confusing



They say lightning doesn't strike twice, but employees of Juice Games may disagree. Having seen its promising *Lamborghini* project dissipate into vapourware following Rage's demise in 2002 (hence the birth of Juice Games) the team has just witnessed history repeat itself as *Juiced* publisher Acclaim finally succumbed to an epic battle with debt. An independent finance deal ensures the rights to the game don't belong to Acclaim, meaning the studio 'just' needs another publisher.

This could be harder than expected, as *Juiced* has issues. The game showed great potential throughout development, and to be fair much of it has been realised. Skip past the atrocious intro and, if in Career mode, you're soon buying a ride and customising it to your wallet's content. The number of options are as intricate and detailed as expected, although a few of the stock figures for some models are dubious – odd considering the game's core demographic will surely be able to pluck these vehicles' top speeds and BHP figures from brains nourished by McDonald's and Max Power. Nevertheless, the depth and breadth of the customisation is impressive, and the vehicle list includes the necessary suspects.

Once you've sorted out your ICE and ECU (and run a dynamometer test to confirm power figures, of course) you're ready to hit the tarmac. The game is calendar-structured, with different types of events (sprint, circuit, point-to-point, showoff) occurring on different days, spread across an LA-style metropolis. Your car, respect (gained from impressing rival crew heads) and cash reserves determine access to these meetings, although you can still attend and bet on participants when you've no option but to watch. Another great touch is the notion of making the player take financial responsibility for damage incurred during events – it heightens realism and injects meetings with the sense of modding culture the game tries hard to encapsulate.

A convincing virtual community and novel touches can't outrun *Juiced*'s major problem. Handling is initially odious, switching between under- and oversteer in a horribly vicious – and unrealistic – fashion, a problem the AI drivers don't seem to have. It improves once past the hot hatches, with the dynamic better suited to a longer wheelbase and rear- or all-wheel drive, but the feeling of unpredictability means you never feel fully engaged. It's enough to significantly twist *Juiced*'s conceptually ambitious chassis.

Edge rating: **Five out of ten**

Colin McRae Rally 2005

Format: **PC, PS2, Xbox (version tested)** Publisher: **Codemasters** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Codemasters is no doubt deciding whether to stick or twist with one of its best-known properties. See, McRae himself hasn't had a World Rally Championship seat for the last two seasons, and now takes part in Wacky Races-inspired events like the Dakar Rally for Nissan. This 2005 outing isn't based on anything quite so extravagant and is so similar to last year's outing as to be embarrassing. McRae's lack of TV exposure and gradual career slide can't be good for business. Indeed, the last time he won the championship upon which this game is based was back in 1995.

One major addition in this annual update is an eightplayer online mode, and while this provides all the multiplayer competitive thrills you'd expect, it's come very late to the table. *Project Gotham 2*, *RalliSport Challenge 2* and Codemasters' own *TOCA Race Driver 2* all offer similar online modes, and with fierce competition from *Burnout 3*, and *GT4* and *Forza Motorsport* on the way, you have to worry about the franchise's future.

Other differences are cosmetic. An updated physics engine records scrapes and smashes with greater authenticity; spectators wave (though their cardboard-cutout appearance is still comically evident); some roadside objects, like hay bales and rocks, now shift if hit, and bushes and trees drop leaves should your chassis rub against them. There's even a motion-blur effect, presumably to signify a dazed state, if you smash into a solid object head on. But this smattering of extra make-up doesn't make you feel like you're playing something fresh.

It was interesting to see SCi go down the focused simulation route with its own *Richard Burns Rally* title. While *Colin McRae 2005* offers a more palatable drive, clearly aimed at all age and experience groups, it would have been braver to see an additional simulation mode complete with strict engine failures, time penalties and retirements for those looking for a more exacting experience. It's also curious to find a game free from the constraints of an official WRC licence with some course designs lacking elevation, imagination and the perilous cliff edges that make the sport so exciting.

Ironically, the fifth in the *Colin McRae* series is still a fine game if – and here's the major caveat – you didn't play last year's update. Those who did will get more fun out of playing spot the difference.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









Power steering can be engaged by pressing the Y button. Collide with a tree and you'll be treated to the sight of gently falling leaves







Car deformation is excellent, with every panel now reacting to knocks and smashes. The visuals are the best yet seen in any rally title. Problem is, there can be few gamers left who have not sampled the familiar McRae formula



Careers advice

The Championship mode is, frankly, a bit dull, but this 2005 edition is boosted with a Career mode that gives your rallying a greater sense of purpose. You start off with underpowered two-wheel-drive vehicles, but eventually unlock bigger and more interesting beasts like the Toyota Celica GT-FOUR, the Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII and McRae's beloved new 4x4 Nissan Pickup-Dakar. It's all played out across the same nine worldwide locations, of course, but at least you feel like your efforts are being rewarded.

Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone

Format: **PS2 (version tested), Xbox** Publisher: **Stormfront** Developer: **Atari** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**135









As was the case with *The Two Towers*, there's a disappointing lack of weight behind swings: only finishing strikes really seem to connect



Old lavender eyes

With *Demon Stone*'s storyline penned by fantasy author R A Salvatore, it's inevitable that his most famous character, Drizzt Do'Urden, makes a scene-stealing playable appearance in the game's most enjoyable level. At one point, Do'Urden cements his reputation as the Realms' hardest elf by singlehandedly breaking a troll siege without upsetting his perfectly coiffured hair.



A blue glow indicates shadows, in which the rogue can trigger her limited invisibility and perform instant kills. It renders her the most useful party member, at least in the glaring absence of a cleric

Forgotten Realms aficionados – there's no need to be bashful, you're among friends – have been well served with games during the setting's near 20-year history. The latest is an interesting proposition: though *Demon Stone* leans heavily on the sword-arm of Stormfront's biggest success, *The Two Towers*, the developer's experience with Realms dates back to the *Savage Frontier* series and the original *Neverwinter Nights*.

Those hoping for a defter touch behind the three-hit-combo brawls and aggressively cinematic presentation will find it, to some degree, in the game's adventuring party. The trio prove for the most part sympathetic characters, and the approximation of companionship provided by the group AI is involving. Regularly cycling direct control, a necessity to power the team's area-clearing super attack, is made second nature by the supporting characters' believable dedication to using their skills sensibly, working in concert to pitch foes off ledges and making ungainly scrambles for healing potions.

The party dynamic wavers, however, in battles where only one character's abilities can allow the others to progress (invariably the mage's ranged attack). Your companions can be relied on for vocal encouragement, but not to defend you from enemies; similarly, leaving obstacle-clearing duties to the AI finds it easily distracted by the endlessly respawning horde. This liability can see the boss fights – which are often poorly paced, mistaking relentlessness for drama – slog on long past the point where a sympathetic dungeon master would fudge the dice rolls.

And blinkered AI is the lesser of two disappointments, considering you're seldom required to use the party for anything other than gang button-mashing: difficulty comes not from increasing reliance on teamwork, but from ever-larger waves of enemies, trampling cooperative strategy. For an action title it's enjoyable enough, but its AD&D leanings are akin to after-school sessions fighting through every creature in the Monster Manual.

Demon Stone suggests more potential than it fulfils, but it's a not-entirely-failed experiment in teaching old dice new tricks, and a follow-up with the same attention to detail but more ambitious design would be welcome. Ultimately, the most memorable aspect isn't technical achievement, but the heroes themselves – and that much is perfectly faithful to the source material.

Edge rating: **Six out of ten**

Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders

ormat: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Phantagram** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**139

The Korean connection is unmistakable. Mediocre soft metal accompanies much the frontend and cinematics, while t-scenes are replete with the malapropisms d duff phraseology only east/west anslations throw up. The voice acting, too, hammy, all Donald Sinden meets fantasy PG. Not that any of this takes away from e game's charm, as the framing, plotting d stentorian tone of the cut-scenes lead eautifully into the carnage on the battlefield. *ngdom Under Fire* is nothing if not brave.

On the surface this may just be an old PC ame converted for console gamers, but the ew mixture of party management, tactics d thirdperson combat gives it a greater ergy and variety. Early missions ease you o the flow, and selecting units and sending em to their destinations is executed by essing left trigger and button combinations. e right trigger enhances an overhead view the battlefield, but this obscures the action. nce an enemy is engaged it's possible to ke it out *Dynasty Warriors*-style, and the irdperson action is surprisingly sturdy, while e clash of metal against bone and the nfusion, blood and carnage of close mbat has been captured spectacularly.

Yet there's a clumsiness about the ontend that undermines the good work ne elsewhere. After a mission success it's ck to the barracks for some obligatory grading of skills and purchasing of uipment. The wealth of options impresses, om building up individual units to providing agical protection to your heroes. However, issions often need to be triggered by static d inane conversations with supporting aracters. And it's not that moving units cross the overhead map is cumbersome, it st looks amateurish. Buy the wrong gear or l to upgrade to match the (unknowable) ctical demands of a mission and you can d yourself in a tactical dead end. This is a iticism of many strategy games, but the unky interface and long loading times ake it particularly infuriating here.

Despite these imperfections, *KUF* is deep d rewarding enough to appeal to hardened mchair strategists, and the addition of a gorous thirdperson combat engine makes is special enough to deserve your interest. rcs and trolls may not give it broad appeal, ut Phantagram's effort deserves as much tention as anything based on Peter ckson's Lord Of The Rings movies.

dge rating: Seven out of ten









Archers can torch enemies in woodland with flame arrows while sappers can set traps for marauding bad guys. Every unit has several specific skills, allowing missions to be completed using creative decison making







Other heroes can be unlocked but Gerald's balance of might and magic, and his verbal outbursts on the battlefield, make him the most appealing. In-game cut-scenes set up the action wonderfully

Clash of the titans

Online clashes are initially sweaty and desperate bouts between units. Take glory on the battlefield, though, and experience soon racks up allowing your hero to recruit more specialised unit types and increasing the tactical avenues available. As in the singleplayer campaign, environment details have to be taken into consideration. It's always better to fight with the sun on your back, and a height advantage can tip a conflict your way. As ever, Opti-match puts you into games against opponents of similar experience.

Uo: Legend Of Seven Waters And Gods

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEI** Developer: **SCEI/Sega Wow** Price: **¥6,800 (£33)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**















Expressive animation and enthusiastic voice acting impart much of the story regardless of the language barrier, but a more import-friendly proposition may be Natsume's proposed American localisation, unfortunately redubbed *Finny The Fish*

Uo could be Sega Wow's act of karmic repentance for *Get Bass* – the other side of the story and the waterline, a dreamlike underwater fantasy occasionally spoiled by the vulgarity of an angler's line from which to wriggle free. With gleeful irony, the older title's catalogue of glittering lures is recycled not as tools of the trade, but as trophies earned for being the one that got away.

A fish of few words and an apparently bottomless stomach, Uo's quest plays out as a more forgiving, candy-striped version of *Ecco: Defender Of The Future*, although a merciless timed challenge and clumsy, often unfair combat will raise the same frustrations. Each stretch of river is home to an animal spirit with a task to fulfil, sending Uo leaping up waterfalls, riding rushing currents and locking fins with exaggeratedly grotesque predators en route.

But the greatest threat isn't these predators, or even the suitably unseen and idle menace of the fishermen whose lines require a bout of frantic thrashing to escape. It's instead Uo's insatiable hunger, with the constant issue of dipping into the local fish, insect and crustacean smorgasbord producing a cleverly barbed dynamic – as the search becomes more desperate, you're more likely to unthinkingly lunge at a tantalising lure.

Uo's chief delights, though, largely come from the lazy flow of exploration, plotting each new bend of its increasingly eccentric waterways: it's a theme played on in the introductory fly-by, offering fleeting glimpses of what lies just a little further downstream. From the shallows dappled by the afternoon sun to the still subterranean lakes, there's a vibrancy that ensures progress is a pleasure and backtracking is seldom a chore – in fact, the game is often at its best when you're free from the demands of unlocking the next section and simply revelling in your buoyant weightlessness.

This sensation is beautifully judged, enough to cover for the otherwise conservative point-to-point gameplay that could have been a considerably clunkier affair as a landfaring platformer. And while *Uo*'s reliance on uncomplicated whimsy may not be to everyone's tastes, the appearance of a good-natured, honestly affable game when it seemed SCEI's reliable reservoir of the stuff was slowing to an indifferently received trickle is something to celebrate.

Edge rating: **Six out of ten**

Amazing Island

rmat: **GameCube** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)**

Previously in **E**138







mazing Island should have been one of the moments when games grew up – a zzling game full of child-like delight which adened and matured gaming's appeal. tead, you're left with the overwhelming nsation of a Christmas present with no teries to go in it.

The amazing thing about Sega's island is pposed to be that you can draw your own nsters. Once you've settled on a design, game breathes life into them and they n represent you on a quest to defeat evil, ich takes the form of a raft of minigames. e scope of the game is very limited: one nd, several dozen minigames and an initial mpletion time of just a few hours. Once se hours are complete, you have an ertaining toolset at your disposal that will t as long as your interest.

It's a promising set-up, but one that's wed at nearly every level. The minigames ge from the banal to the baffling, with only ouple of standout delights. Many feel like designers have taken a look at some rio Party classics and then set aside a ek to figure out how to break them. ucturally, the game all too often punishes u for its own failings in explaining the odd ntrols, and it's easy to become dispirited by ame which ought to inspire. For a game arly aimed at children, it's an odd choice.

The monster-drawing system makes a ld attempt to hold your hand – removing stage fright a blank piece of paper can e nervous doodlers. Instead, you pick from rame – human, dog-like, dragon-like – and t it. Once complete, the blank form of your ature is fixed and you can set about ding patterns, faces and weapons. litting the process in two is clearly pposed to streamline it, but instead it riates since it strangles the kind of creative provisation that should be the game's eatest strength. Similarly, the frames soon come limiting frustrations, things that must subverted in order to gain the freedom u want. Elaborate results are still possible, t you'll have your own industriousness to nk, not the game.

Magic Pengel still stands as the nchmark for the drawing game, providing xibility, freedom and inspiration in a world t felt rich and alive. Its gameplay and ucture, however, were lacking and *nazing Island* could have been the me to perfect the balance. It hasn't.

lge rating: Four out of ten





The game supports up to four players, but to play specific events you'll need to endure a torturous set-up procedure every single round





Frames, such as this rabbit, are only starting points for your creations. If you want to make a wheeled monster, you might need to draw tiny stunted legs as attachment points, even if you don't want them



Linkin' park

Once you've created a monster you must take its photo. Link up a GBA to the GC and this photo becomes a downloadable monster card, allowing you to detach your GBA and challenge your friends to a simplistic Pokémon-lite fight. It's a nice touch, and better presented than much of the main game. Victory unlocks new skills for GBA battles, as well as new ready-made monsters you can try out in the main game.


AG SYSTEMS
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F3600 ANTI - GRAVITY RACING LEAGUE

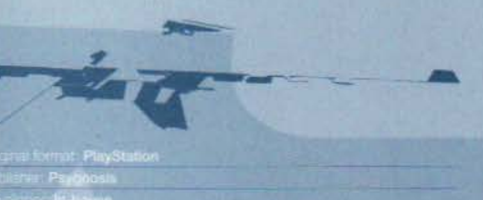
The making of...

Wipeout

Forget Lara. There was only one true herald of the arrival of the PlayStation generation. Real 3D, real music, real gaming. The future, after years of waiting, was finally now







ginal format: PlayStation
blisher: Psygnosis
eloper: In-House
igin: UK
ginal release date: 1995

Wipeout is a central part of the easy answer of The PlayStation Success Story. Its licenced music and in-club promotion are held up as the keys to attracting the post-pub generation. Play it now, however, and you'll see a contradiction. Often regarded as the originator of gaming's move towards the cool and the casual, it actually pointed the other way: towards bare-bones gameplay and aggressively clean styling. It was the perfect ambassador for Sony's understated PlayStation powerhouse – all style, all substance.

It is somewhat ironic, then, that the origins of videogaming's most famous trendsetter were in the resolutely unfashionable grid-based strategy game *Matrix Marauders*, which featured vehicle designs uncannily similar to those in *Wipeout*. The game concept had been designed by Psygnosis stalwart Jim Bowers, but when *Wipeout's* designer-to-be **Nick Burcombe** saw a SoftImage animation of two of the ships racing he became inspired: "I'd been watching over his shoulder as it took place," says Burcombe of the animation. "It reminded me a little of *Powerdrome*, *F-Zero* and *Super Mario Kart*. I was in the throes of finishing *Mario Kart* at the time and found it to be possibly the greatest game I'd ever played." As seems mandatory for all great Britsoft productions, the idea took further shape in the local pub. "Myself and Jimmy were sat in the Shrewsbury Arms one night discussing the idea, and in the best tradition of drinking too much and talking too fast, the name *Wipeout* came out," recalls Burcombe. "The conversation turned to the music and Jim and I were enjoying the Prodigy at the time. We joked about getting the Prodigy doing an up-to-date remix of the Beach Boys' classic surf ditty – Wipeout. We simply pictured Liam Howlett being right in your face screaming 'Hehehehehehee, wipe oooout!' and then it kicking off at 140bpm with some awesome hardcore. It was such an ace moment – it stuck."

When work on the game was given the green light by Psygnosis, Burcombe, as lead designer, began the difficult job of designing the tracks. "After seeing things in action, tracks like Altima 7 were built and specifically designed to get a stomach-churning drop after a huge hill climb," he explains. "As you come over the big drop, you were initially supposed to just fly off the end and be looking down on the scene trying to pick a landing spot. Of course, this means that you have to drawn right to the maximum horizon – which we couldn't – not at these scales. So the plan was to put it in a cave instead. You still got the drop, but at least you couldn't see the draw-in and it didn't frame out."

Rather less effort went into fine-tuning the inclusion of weapons in the game, with Burcombe admitting that until the sequel the weapon you received was chosen entirely at random. "The key was to take a leaf out of *Mario Kart*'s book," he explains. "All the weapons were designed to stall the opponent – not necessarily kill them. And in terms of balancing, well, we didn't really bother too much."

> "We pictured Liam Howlett being right in your face screaming 'Hehehehehehee, wipe oooout!' and then it kicking off at 140bpm with some awesome hardcore"

As an important launch title for the PlayStation in Europe there was no great wealth of experience to call upon for working on a 3D console game. Indeed, Sony's interest in Psygnosis was primarily due to its







Psygnosis became involved with the movie Hackers as it was working on *Wipeout*, producing a rendered sequence that appeared in the film as game footage

technological experience, initially through work on CD titles such as *Microcosm*. "Exploring the hardware takes time, and although we knew it was capable of more, you have to call it a day on the R&D side and get a game written," says Burcombe.

Too hot to handle

The only major criticism levelled at the game was its difficult, seemingly over-sensitive, handling and although Burcombe was happy to modify this for the sequel he is generally unrepentant: "The steering and skidding and weight and feel of the craft, I have no regrets at all – that was *Wipeout*."

Indeed, the sequel was a resounding success all round, despite only having had a seven-month development period. "We knew what was wrong with the first one and so we fixed it," says Burcombe. "We had more time to tune the gameplay rather than battling with the technology and we had some awesome people making some great innovations – although I don't think the track design was as good as in the first one."

Burcombe was not involved in either *Wipeout 3* or *Wipeout Fusion*, and instead left to head up the independent developer Curly Monsters, which created *N-GEN Racing* for PS1 and *Quantum Redshift* on Xbox. The latter was essentially a *Wipeout* sequel in all but name, but disappointed in terms of uninspired gameplay and music selection. "The game wasn't innovating enough and didn't adopt or more importantly enhance the *Wipeout* formula with the music and graphic design," admits Burcombe. "It also didn't help that the boxart was such a piece of shit. It was so bad we asked Microsoft if we could put a file on our website of an alternative image for the box art and they said yes!"

Despite now working back at SCEE, Burcombe is not on the team for PSP title *Wipeout Pure*. He has instead opted to work on *F1 2005*. "I wanted to put a big established IP under my belt and see if I can add something else to the *F1* franchise," he claims.

What on the face of it seems a curiously mundane career choice begins to make more sense when the question of what he would like to see in a next-generation home console *Wipeout* is asked:

"I'd love it to get back being more realistic and less stylised when in the racing environment. I'd love to see a modification and tuning side to it – tuning a *Wipeout* craft should be an art form. I'd also like to see full customisation for a unique online presence. International circuits based on real DEM (digital elevation map) data with highest resolution aerial photography as a basis for the underlying scenery. I'd like to see an online-only game. I'd like to see the world of *Wipeout* being its own online sport – like an F1-style event."

It's a startling notion, until you remember how seriously *Wipeout* took itself as a realistic future racer.



This early shot shows how much work went in to perfecting the game's classy interface. Later evolutions of the game imagined a lavish future, but the first game always emphasised mundane believability over idle fantasy

"I think most people saw Wipeout as something quite new and fresh and very PlayStation. Integrating contemporary graphic design, music, and technology"

A lack of enthusiasm from US marketing also didn't help the game, but their assertion that future racers don't sell any more is not without substance. "The mass market audience does not appear to understand or connect in any way with a futuristic world of racing. It's abstract and requires a greater leap of imagination than the majority of people are willing to give," says Burcombe. According to him, the nearest modern equivalent is in fact *Need For Speed: Underground*: "It's culturally relevant, it's cool-sounding and it's got impressive looking technology in it."

Ultimately, however, that realism may have been more important to Burcombe than it was to many *Wipeout* fans. What's unquestionable is that it was this unique mix of influences that made the original the milestone it was. "Ultimately, I think most people saw *Wipeout* as something quite new and fresh and very PlayStation," he says. "Integrating contemporary graphic design, music, and technology reached an audience that I could only describe as the same as us: 'hip geeks' I think the marketing department ended up calling them."

Nearly ten years on, *Wipeout*'s sense of 3D is still rarely topped. Swooping cambers required players to tweak their nose pitch to perfect fast lap times

Whip E Out

In reality, it is likely that *Wipeout*'s longest lasting legacy will be its effect on gaming's cultural kudos rather than on a slightly obscure subgenre. "At the time I didn't feel like licensed music was any great achievement: we had a CD and a CD player – it made sense to play CD quality music," says a modest Burcombe. "It's only in retrospect that I suppose that it was a big leap for the industry."

The decision to involve The Designers Republic was certainly not an obvious idea, but as artist **Lee Carus** (who is working on *Wipeout Pure*) recalls, it was a moment of serendipity that ensured the design company's involvement was as extensive as it was: "On one of those dark late nights when I was creating the intro sequence I noticed a fax from DR laying on Keith [Hopwood]'s desk. I thought to myself, 'That fax header is cool'! I scanned it in and mapped it over the texture on the side of one of the ships – I thought it worked really well, so did marketing and so did DR. Their involvement escalated from that point..."

EA's **Glen O'Connell** was PR manager at Psygnosis at the time and remembers the effect all this had on the game's marketing. "I am personally most proud of the acceptance that we managed to get of gaming in general into the mainstream and often cynical sections of the style media. We had a product that looked different, sounded different and effectively tasted different than anything that had been around before," he recalls. "I also remember the company created an advertising campaign that initially spooked many people out, including Sony themselves, showing two teenagers sitting on a sofa with blood coming from their noses and in a comatose state. The campaign signified the sensation of speed, but many people also jointly associated it with the other, whispered, connotations of the name."



Part of the original *Wipeout* team, taking a break with a scale model of a prototype AG racer. Designer Nick Burcombe is seated on the far right, front row

RESET

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 77, November 1999

'PlayStation2. Exposed: the hardware, the software, the power…' If ever a trailing ellipsis gave some insight into pure tech desire, it was the one on the cover of **E**77. Three small dots betrayed this often stoic magazine's excitement about Sony's next-generation hardware unveiling. Perhaps if we'd had a little more prescience our fervour might have been tempered. *The Bouncer*, *Dark Cloud* and *Street Fighter EX 3* were among the games supposed to give a glimpse of the future of interactive entertainment. Moreover, the comments about 'stable, widescale connectivity by 2001' might want a quick run through the old cynical crystal ball, too.

Perhaps more representative of gaming's future was the cover feature. Well, a certain aspect of gaming's future, anyway. The Daily Mail's dystopian future, whose timeline begins with *Operation Wolf* and culminates in *Manhunt*, takes in cover star Raven's super-violent *Soldier Of Fortune* on the way. We took the US developers paintballing to get the bloodlust flowing, then hit them for quotes.

"I hate to say it," said project coordinator **Eric Biessman**, not really sounding like he hated to say it at all, "but that's what a lot of people in the firstperson shooter market look for. Even *Half-Life* was pretty gruesome when you shot a marine." Now, admittedly we can't see a thirdperson version of that argument holding up for certain other controversial games, but, hey, maybe it's worth a shot.

A shot – get it? Oh, please yourselves…



DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"We'll obviously need a whole new version for Germany. We have to cut out all the gore, all the death animations, remove references to real locations and change the characters to make them robots."
So what's going to be left in *Soldier Of Fortune*, Eric Biessman?

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

"Aw, come on. Batman And Robin was a work of art. Pure, unadulterated genius."
Some people couldn't see how far our tongue was into our cheek.

TESTSCREEN SCORES

Jet Force Gemini (N64; 9/10), *Final Fantasy VIII* (PS; 9/10), *Ready 2 Rumble Boxing* (DC; 8/10), *Homeworld* (PC; 8/10), *Cool Boarders Burrrn* (DC; 5/10), *System Shock 2* (PC; 8/10), *Speed Devils* (DC; 7/10), *Drakan* (PC; 7/10), *Tony Hawk's Skateboarding* (PS; 7/10), *Wipeout 3* (PS; 7/10), *Sega Rally 2* (DC; 7/10), *Virtua Fighter 3TB* (DC; 7/10)



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1. The hardware that kick-started a revolution (Emotion Engine not pictured)
2. A Sega boss catches sight of the future, courtesy of the *Shenmue* engine
3. UK Resistance remained committed to the console
4. Sony courted the key extraterrestrial demographic
5. Well, you'd have to be off the planet to appreciate *The Bouncer*, right?
6. PS2 *Gradius III and IV*: the in-game action didn't look like this, of course. You realised that, right?
7. Sega was countering with the likes of this…
8. And this…
9. And this!
10. Meanwhile, Nintendo pursued the 64DD add-on



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I'm not one for complaining (though my girlfriend might disagree), but lately I've felt – how shall I put this? – slightly put upon. You see, while I'm thankful (very!) for having perfect 20/20 vision, I'm unfortunately disadvantaged in that I'm severely colour blind, or "markedly red/green colour blind," as my optician put it.

I've never really had trouble with anything before, not even traffic lights, though the RAF did stop short of letting me join up as a weapons technician. (I wonder why?) But I digress. My problem, you see, is that I'm suffering at the hands of some damned fiendish game design, specifically meant to turn already tough games (for me, at any rate) into impossible monsters that make me want to pull what little hair I have left right out of their cosy little roots.

For example, imagine my sense of achievement as I finally reached the final boss of *Metroid Prime*. And imagine my sense of despair as I realised I had to match the colour of my wave beam to the colour of said boss's elbow pads. Time after time I would pull a weapon out of my not-inconsiderable shorts, sometimes managing to guess the right colour, but most times going through trial and error 'til I saw I was actually doing some damage. By which time, of course, my huge nemesis had already gone and changed colour anyway. Cheers for that.

Another game I'm struggling with a little is *Disgaea*. I'm enjoying it, but oh how I lament that I cannot chain those combos together with those lovely coloured pyramid thingies so thoughtfully left lying around each map. I read on forums how much fun people are having, but not me – I've had to give up on that part of the game altogether.

Oh, well, there's always draughts. (Black and white, you see?)

Even the old classic *Bust A Move* causes me all sorts of problems, helped a little by the fact that there are little designs within each coloured bubble which help me distinguish them on from another. It's the only game my girlfriend can beat me at. Of course, she sees this as an opportunity to berate my gaming skills, carefully nurtured for 20 years. I silently pray that the God of Thunder will strike her down.

I do have a point, and I'd like to bring it to the attention of game designers everywhere through your magazine, and that is to ask the designers to spare a thought for the nine per cent of male gamers with defective colour vision if they are going to put colour puzzles in games, and use a mechanism that will help us play along too. Use designs as well as colour, use textures and different shapes. That way we can play too! Would you kindly pass on my tiny grievance? (Though I swear if I ever come across another end boss like that of *Metroid Prime* I'll consider gouging out my own eyes and posting them off to Nintendo in protest.)

Mark Patience

PS I did actually beat that final boss, though luck had more to do with it than skill, methinks.

Let's be honest, with so many game developers failing at the hurdle of making something worth actually playing for any length of time, it's probably asking a bit too much to expect them to consider the subtlety of colour schemes. And then there are games that should be subtitled for deaf players and so and so on. Make no mistake: we have a long way to go before issues such as these become commonplace considerations.

Reading your analysis of the book First Person in Out There (**E**140) made me question the nature of the discourse within computer games study. The notion of one camp holding to a rigid narrative involvement doctrine and the other a pure experiential doctrine seems to disregard the differing and complex values held by gamers themselves. (By the way, I haven't read the book, and am basing my argument on your column.)

I, for example, am much more engrossed by 'pure' gaming dynamics such as *Advance Wars 2* than I am sitting through the endless (poor) cinematics of *Metal Gear Solid*. However, many may gain more pleasure from infusing themselves within the filmic mirror of cut-scenes. We all get our kicks from different places. Thus, you may argue that I sit within the 'experiential pleasure' camp.

When I was studying psychoanalysis of cinematic involvement, it appeared to have a point: cinema (and other artforms) require people to empathise and be drawn into the images and narrative. The reflective nature of the screen may be one process and it may be one device that manages this process. But where lies gaming? Before technological advances allowed for cut-scenes and other cinematic masturbation, they relied on a more base physical reaction – adrenaline. I mean, could any of us really internalise Pac-Man's voyage?

But this is where I come back to *Advance Wars 2*. Here is a game (with an admittedly weak storyline but vaguely engaging characters) devised purely in terms of tactical gameplay. Yet within this, I have no qualms about blowing up that APC filled with a team of good men. Why not? Because they are the enemy! They must be destroyed to save Yellow Comet! I love *AW2* for its mechanics; nevertheless, there is still some part of the empathic mirror staring back at me from that small (and un-backlit) screen. See, things aren't that black and white, they are usually a huge palette spread across a multitude of polygons...

Ascher Nathan

The problem with, as you put it, the nature of the discourse within computer games study is that it's so often not coming from the right places. So here, once more, is a pledge to look into an issue raised by **Edge**'s readers in a later edition.

Chris Ward's letter (**E**140) on the 'evils' of marketing struck a chord with me. It is a fascinating and sometimes disturbing process to see how business reacts to content creators and artists, not only in the software business but also in other activities of a similar nature such as writing, films and music. I believe there are definite

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Perfect Dark, claims Reg, outstrips more modern FPS games such as *Doom 3* in almost all areas

cations that business practices stifle creativity d indeed may ultimately be incompatible with . Considerations such as franchising and market mentation, as well as all the other paraphernalia narketing, simply accentuate a trend towards nd, homogenised 'products', where original IP tifled or at least neutered by marketing.

This is particularly true where the business ls with a creative product, since marketing s itself as a creative discipline and thus feels itled to contribute to the creative process. Fair ugh – be creative with toothpaste; don't tell ne designers how to write games.

I hasten to add that I recognise that marketing legitimate discipline of great value to the siness world, but I take exception to the fact t the power-brokers are the middlemen, who ld not be there without the people who create. restingly, there have been increasing noises in industry about the lack of recognition for the creators in the games industry – and indeed y shouldn't they be on a par with musicians, d why do they instead tend to be viewed as re 'programmers', usually less well rewarded d treated than the 'suits'?

k Wood

e best marketers are those who know (and love) products they're supposed to be shifting. It lly isn't rocket science: employ people with a uine understanding of what you're selling, and esire to communicate its strengths to others, d everyone can be a winner. More videogame olishers need to appreciate that simply flogging ilarly-sized boxes isn't what it's all about.

"But how are we supposed to sell 'risky', ovative' games?" is a question your average rketeer might ask. Well, that's something EA d to consider when it first had the option to olish a curio like *The Sims*.

As for game creators getting more credit for r work, we're getting back into the area of our-blindness considerations. This is still a ng industry, and it's only a matter of time before more productions are preceded with Sid Meier/American McGee-style intros. We have to hope, of course, that such grandstanding doesn't distract them from the business of making innovative software we want to play.

After just getting back from a three-day break in Brussels with my wife on Friday 13 August, all that was on my mind was the release of *Doom 3*. When I arrived home that night too late to go and buy it I completely ignored an airmail package waiting for me from the States, as all I wanted was *Doom*! The next morning couldn't come round quick enough – I went straight to the shop then back home with my new purchase. My wife was out for the rest of the day. Yes! I could lose myself completely in my beloved joy!

After installation I was in totally engrossed, then it struck me after five minutes of play: what the hell was this? What had id been up to for so long to try to create a half-breed child of *Doom* and *Half-Life*? What were they thinking? I accept the graphics are fantastic, but something was missing. It didn't feel quite right when you unleashed your fury on the hellspawn, as if you were shooting paper cutouts rather than solid, living monsters. Even the weapons didn't feel right.

So there I was, completely let down by this so-called FPS killer of a title... Then I remembered the airmail package I had so wrongfully ignored. I couldn't open it quick enough, realising it was what I had bought a week earlier on eBay from the States. It was *Perfect Dark* for my US N64.

Now this it what I call an FPS – it's now four years old and it still rocks. I haven't put it down since starting on the Perfect difficulty setting straight off. Who needs graphics so lifelike? What we need is a game that grabs you by the nuts and doesn't let go 'til you're screaming for more in some sadistic way. We need more games like this four-year-old one that offers more in five minutes than *Doom 3* could offer in a lifetime. Please, Rare, where are you when we need you most? Programmers need to look at these games and realise what made them so good.

The likes of *GoldenEye*, *Perfect Dark* and *Far Cry* got it right by totally engrossing you with their weapons, their enemies. OK, some of the monsters may not have looked great, but they felt right when you hit them with the arsenal you were carrying. I just can't believe id got it so wrong.

Reg

Well, it's true that *Far Cry 2* can't come soon enough (the original is probably our favourite PC game of the year so far), but you're going to be waiting even longer for another firstperson shooter from the boys at Rare, and even longer still for something to match up to the quality of *GoldenEye*. But, yes, eBay is our friend.

I ask one (though very blunt) question: to what extent is videogaming theory relevant to today's videogamers? Is academic endeavour pertaining to videogames there merely to appease the demand for game designers to scavenge for new ideas, or for the genuine need for some sort of explanatory power, some sort of sustenance away from one's previous reliance on other media?

Though much is owed to your publication for having afforded much interest into theoretical studies, one cannot help but feel that there still lies a stark disregard for academic plight on your part.

By all means encourage game designers to pick away at what to them is decipherable from a technical perspective, but let it be known that such investigations (theoretical or otherwise) are done not for their appeasement, but for one's own ratification – due moreover to fledgling methodologies.

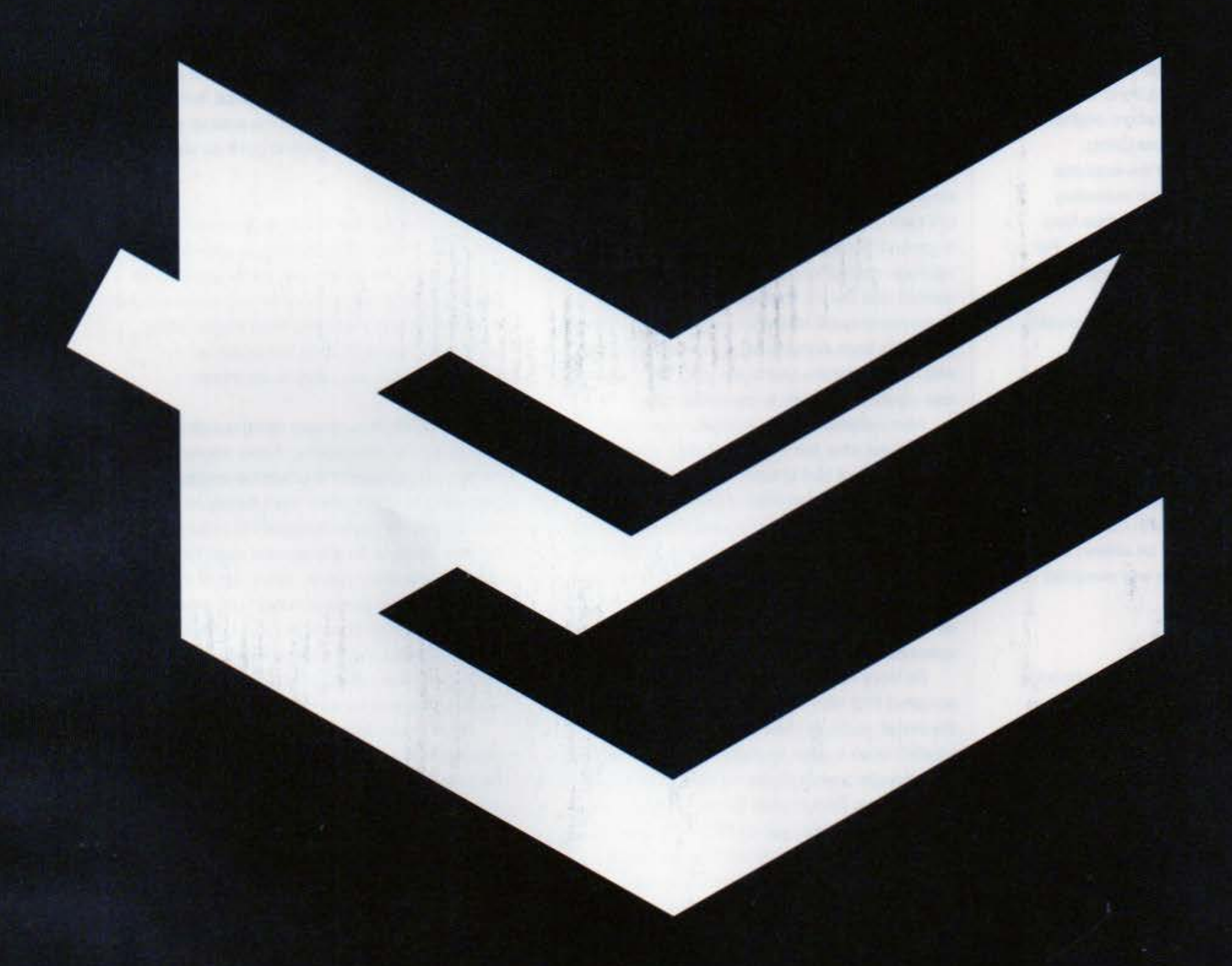
It is not that I propose 'game designers do their job and we'll get on with ours' but that a little constructive criticism based on slightly differing fields of perspective would be greater appreciated.

Toops

Hey, what happened to the letters complaining about *Mario Kart: Double Dash* getting five out of ten? That's what we want to know.

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Next month






NOVEMBER 2004
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